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Still Dreaming of You:
Selena's Discourse with and Continuing Impact on American Musical Culture

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Music in Music with a concentration in Music History

by

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University of Arkansas
Bachelor of Music in Music, 2019

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Abstract

Selena Quintanilla Perez continues to circulate in popular culture, including MAC cosmetic lines, a Netflix series, and podcasts. As a result, her cultural influence continues to be passed on and shared with future generations. This thesis focuses on three aspects of Selena and Selena y Los Dinos: Selena's music, Selena's performance aesthetic, and Selena's fandom today. Chapter 1 focuses on Selena y Los Dinos' American musical influences, particularly studying the songs "Enamorada de ti," "Missing my Baby," and "Fotos y Recuerdos" and the presence of American genres of new jack swing, R&B, and rock within them. Chapter 2 focuses on Selena's crossover album *Dreaming of You*. Within this chapter Selena's self-presentation is studied and categorized as representing two parts: Selena's "personaje" or performance character and Selena's "persona" or personal presentation. The songs "I Could Fall in Love" and "Dreaming of You" are studied to identify how a Mexican American Latina was marketed to a non-Latinx American musical market. Through musical analysis and reception study, these songs reveal that Selena was marketed as a stereotypical "Latin lover" to non-Latinx American audiences. Chapter 3 explores Selena's digital fandom and the use of digital fan labor to preserve Selena's legacy in popular culture. Through ethnographic study, four creators of Selena tribute social media accounts are interviewed to explore the world of Selena's internet. Selena's fans utilize digital fan labor both as "worker" and "entrepreneur," as Selena is no longer alive to continue her career. Selena's fandom allows for fans to showcase both sides of Selena's self-presentation as well as participate in Selena's commercialization, including circulating information regarding Selena's memorabilia through fan meeting events, Selena tribute Facebook pages, group chats, and vlogs. Her legacy lives on through her family and her fans, who continue to advocate for Selena to be remembered not because of her music, or her beauty, but because of who she was.

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Dedication

To baby Lastra, may you grow up to be unapologetically proud of your heritage. May you fully believe Selena's wisdom to "believe that the impossible is always possible."

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Introduction

“And we gotta prove to the Americans how American we are and we gotta prove to the Mexicans how Mexican we are. We gotta be more Mexican than the Mexicans and more American than the Americans, it’s exhausting!” – Abraham Quintanilla in Selena (1997) played by Edward James Olmos¹

In this scene from the 1997 biopic *Selena*, the character Abraham explains to his children, Selena and A.B., why a performance in Monterrey, Mexico is a risky endeavor for their South Texas based family band, Selena y Los Dinos. He notes the harshness of the Mexican music market, as the Mexican musical scene very rarely accepted Mexican American bands at the time. Regardless, Selena y Los Dinos managed to break through the Mexican musical market while also achieving success in both the Latinx and United States mainstream music markets. The sound of Selena y Los Dinos displayed the blended eclectic array of genres known as Tejano music.

Both Selena and her band Selena y Los Dinos embodied a dual dynamic presentation and sound as Mexican Americans in Texas. Latinx historian Sarah Misemer asserts that Selena “was a bi-cultural sensation” who appealed to both the U.S. Latinx market and the wider Latinx market.² Selena’s represented a unique identity as a third generation Mexican American, as she was born in the U.S. and did not learn Spanish until she was 14 years old when she began singing with Selena y Los Dinos. Selena managed to appeal to a wide array of fans while performing a specific genre of Tejano music that had not appealed so widely across markets before. Misemer categorizes Selena’s fans into four main categories: Tejano and Mexican

¹ *Selena*, directed by Gregory Nava (Warner Brothers, 1997), accessed March 25, 2021, <https://www.amazon.com/Selena-Jennifer-Lopez/dp/B001AWDF18>.

² Sarah M. Misemer, *Secular Saints: Performing Frida Kahlo, Carlos Gardel, Eva Peron, and Selena* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2008), 129.

American, fans in Mexico, fans in other Latin American countries, and non-Latinx fans in the U.S.³ Adding to this complex identity of the music of Selena y Los Dinos is the band's Mexican American culture. While the band performed Spanish music and was much more popular in the Latinx music scene, the influence of American popular music of the late 1980s and early 1990s culture was apparent in the sound of Selena y Los Dinos, especially hip hop and R&B. As Deborah R. Vargas notes, "Selena's music captured the underexplored cultural dialogue between Mexican American and African American communities and the challenges for Mexican American popular music traveling south of the U.S.-Mexico border."⁴ However, this cultural dialogue between Mexican Americans and African American communities in Selena's English songs has not been explored.

In her article "The Brown Madonna: Selena," Misemer refers to the 1995 writing by Gomez-Peña on the complicated nature of culture at the U.S. border. Gomez-Peña characterizes the success of Selena in both northern Mexico and the U.S. Southwest as a "dual dynamic."⁵ Misemer equates the "dual-dynamic" with the identity of Selena writing, "the movement back and forth across borders and the contamination of styles, language, culture, politics, and economics, ultimately found a sort of resting place in the music of Selena."⁶ The music of Selena y Los Dinos represented the dynamic nature of Mexican influence on Tejano culture in the Southwest. However, also important was the U.S. musical influence on Selena y Los Dinos. The band represented a new generation of Mexican Americans, attuned with the soft rock music of bands such as the Eagles and Journey but also influenced by the growing R&B and disco music

³ Misemer, *Secular Saints*, 129.

⁴ Deborah R. Vargas, "Bidi Bidi Bom Bom: Selena and Tejano Music in the Making of Texas," in *Latino/a Popular Culture*, ed. by Michelle Habell-Pallan and Mary Romero (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 123.

⁵ Misemer, 139.

⁶ Misemer, 129.

such as Janet Jackson and Donna Summer. Therefore, the music of Selena y Los Dinos offers a case study into the many influences on Tejano youth in the 1980s and 1990s.

Selena y Los Dinos's success, along with the success of Selena's crossover English album after her tragic death, emphasized the growing U.S. Latinx youth market to the U.S. recording companies. The music of Selena y Los Dinos is also said to have introduced regional Tejano, which was often seen as music of the blue-collar lower Latinx class, to the international Latinx mainstream market.⁷ Also important to my study of the sound of Selena y Los Dinos is their infusion of American pop musical idioms to the Tejano sound. Their music represented the dynamic of the young Mexican American youth of the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Within this thesis I refer to Selena Quintanilla Perez by her stage name, Selena. I also refer to her brother Abraham Quintanilla III as A.B., which is the most common way that fans and scholars refer to him to differentiate between A.B. and his father Abraham Quintanilla. The band officially became known as Selena and not Selena y Los Dinos in 1989 with the release of their album *Selena* with EMI Latin. However, when discussing the music written by A.B., Ricky Vela, and Pete Astudillo I refer to the band as Selena y Los Dinos and not Selena, in order to credit the songwriters. Therefore, when I refer to Selena as a performer and person, I use the term, Selena. Studying Selena y Los Dinos also requires a focus on collaboration. The music of Selena y Los Dinos was largely written and produced by Selena's brother, A.B. Quintanilla. Lyrics were most often written by singer-songwriter Pete Astudillo and keyboardist Ricky Vela. While there were occasions of other collaborations, including Selena, most songs were written by A.B. and Astudillo.

⁷ Peña, *Música Tejana*, 196 mentioned in Deborah Paradez, "Remembering Selena, Re-memembering Latindad," *Theatre Journal* 54, no. (March 2002): 64.

Lacking from analysis of this wide appeal of Selena is a study on the American musical influences apparent in Selena y Los Dinos' songs. Musicological study has not focused on Selena and her bands contributions to the American popular music scene. Scholars that have focused on Selena's music include theater scholar Deborah Paredez in her book *Selinidad: Selena, Latinos, and the Performance of Memory* and gender, sexuality, and race scholar Deborah Vargas in her book *Dissonant Divas in Chicana Music: The Limits of La Onda*.⁸⁹ Selena and her band's contributions to music and popular culture merit further analysis and study by popular music studies. My hope is that further musicological studies on Selena will continue due to her relevance today. My thesis focuses on three aspects of Selena and Selena y Los Dinos: Selena's music, Selena's performance aesthetic, and Selena's fandom today. By studying Selena's self-presentation, musical sound, and continuing fandom I argue that Selena's legacy persists not because of her "star presence" or death but because of who she was as a person.

Mexican American Identity in the 1980s and 1990s

The term Hispanic was introduced in U.S. in the 1970s by the administration of Richard Nixon, which officially deemed that all people of Latin American and Spanish descent living in the country represent this category.¹⁰ Before this adoption, the U.S. census often asked populations to identify their descent by country. However, the homogenization of people of Latin American descent in the 1970s sought to combine the *pueblos americanos*, when the culture of peoples from differing Spanish speaking countries greatly differed.

⁸ Deborah Paredez, *Selinidad: Selena, Latinos, and the performance of memory* (Duke University Press Books: Durham, NC, 2009).

⁹ Deborah R. Vargas, *Dissonant Divas in Chicana Music: The Limits of La Onda* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

¹⁰ Suzanne Oboler, *Ethnic Labels, Latino Lives: Identity and Politics of (Re)Presentation in the United States* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), xiii.

Many Latinxs were expected to assimilate in U.S. culture, particularly through learning English. However, the Chicano movement pushed for Mexican Americans to be proud of their Mexican background and to continue to learn Spanish. In Texas, Mexican American culture continued to evolve, especially in the *frontera*, as new generations of Mexican descendants were born and dealt with complexities of Mexican American identity.

By the 1980s the Latinx civil rights movement, which started during the 1950s, greatly affected the living conditions in Texas for Latinxs. Organizations such as the Leagues of United Latin American Citizens and the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund sought to remove discriminatory practices towards Mexican Americans in Texas. By the 1980s the majority of Mexican Americans in Texas were second or third generation and understood both the dominant U.S. mainstream culture as well as the Tejano subculture. According to the 1990 U.S. census, 4 million people of Latinx descent were reported in the state of Texas, which was 26% of the population.¹¹ Texas' proximity to the Mexican border resulted in a continuous influx of immigrants from Mexico. Nevertheless, in the 1990 census only 20% of the Latinx population in Texas reported being of foreign birth.

A Short History of Tejano Music

The roots of Tejano music are found in the conjunto music of the 1930s, which itself was influenced by the accordion and polka music of German, Czech, and Polish immigrants that moved into the southwest as early as the 1860s to build railroad lines. Most influential to

¹¹ Arnoldo de León, "Mexican Americans," Texas State Historical Association Handbook of Texas, revised December 3, 2020, accessed April 20, 2021, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/mexican-americans>.

Mexican American southwest culture was the Germanic culture. This included urban dances such as the polka and waltz and instruments such as accordions, harmonicas, and brass bands.¹²

Tejano music from the 1930s to the 1950s has been categorized into two distinct styles, conjunto and orquesta Tejana. Conjunto was considered the music of the poor working class whereas orquesta Tejana appealed to the Mexican American upper class. Early conjunto music had the button accordion as the lead instrument and the twelve-string bass guitar known as the bajo sexto as the rhythm and bass section.¹³ The typical conjunto instrumental ensemble, of a two-row accordion, bajo sexto, electric bass, and a dance band drum set, from the 1950s was founded by Tony De La Rosa.¹⁴ De La Rosa was famous for covering country songs in a conjunto style by translating the lyrics to Spanish and changing instrumentation. However, this set up changed later in the 1950s with the introduction of electric amplification and drums. Typical conjunto repertoire consisted of corridos, which were folk-like songs, and rancheros, which were mixed with influences of European waltzes and polkas.

Occurring simultaneously with conjunto from the 1930s to the 1950s was music known as orquesta Tejana, which consisted of big band instrumentation with accordion added. The music of orquesta Tejana represented the music of bicultural Mexican Americans of the 1940s and 1950s. Musicians in orquesta Tejana wore tuxedos, could read music, and played music in ballrooms. The audience of orquesta Tejana was more interested in being accepted into the Anglicized U.S. culture than that of conjunto.¹⁵ The bicultural identity of these Texas Mexicans-

¹² Ramiro Burr, *Billboard Guide to Tejano and Regional Mexican Music* (New York: Billboard Books, 1999), 17.

¹³ Burr, *Billboard Guide to Tejano*, 22-23.

¹⁴ Burr, 20.

¹⁵ Manuel Peña, "From Ranchero to Jaitón: Ethnicity and Class in Texas- Mexican Music (Two Styles in the Form of a Pair)," *Ethnomusicology* 24, no. 1 (Winter 1985): 39-40, accessed April 25, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.2307/852323>.

Americans made them want to have a “high class” big band which was popular in the United States. The music resulted in the mix of a polka ranchero with a jazz big band arrangement. Big bands, such as Beto Villa’s orquesta Tejana, consisted of as many of 12 musicians playing music ranging from big band arrangements of rancheros to the American foxtrot.¹⁶

In the 1950s, Mexican American teens were looking for their own music that challenged the establish norms of Tejano music at the time. Isidro “El Indio” Lopez provided such music by mixing accordions from conjunto and big band instrumentation from orquesta Tejana. He also expanded the repertoire of Tejano music, covering mariachi, rock n roll, boleros, big band polka, and rancheras. This cultural fusion has come to represent Tejano music and was described by Ramiro Burr as the “spirit of Tejano.”¹⁷

The Tejano music genre had an important cultural shift between the 1970s and the 1980s. The 1970s saw a decline in Tejano music, as Mexican artists and American disco and country became more popular in the Texas borderland. The 1980s American pop culture scene influenced the Tejano musical performance practices with artists branching away from conjunto and orquesta Tejana instrumentation and instead using drums, guitar, bass, keyboard, synthesizer, and occasionally congas.

The 1990s is considered by Tejano researcher Manuel Peña the golden age of Tejano music. In 1990, the Latin division of Capitol Records, EMI Latin, bought the major Tejano label Cara Records. This opened up larger production and touring opportunities for signed Tejano artists. During the 1990s, younger Tejano acts began incorporating other genres with Tejano to

¹⁶ Manuel Peña, “Orquesta Tejana: The Formative Years,” *The University of Texas at Austin*, last updated March 5, 2004, accessed December 1, 2020, <https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/benson/border/arhoolie2/orquesta.html>.

¹⁷ Burr, *Billboard Guide to Tejano*, 24.

stay relevant. This proved to be a huge success, and Tejano music began to have a larger market. Bands used electronic sequencing to create modern mixes more in line with the American pop and R&B style. It is in this flourishing Tejano music genre that Selena y Los Dinos matured and reached peak fame.

Selena y Los Dinos Biography

Selena Quintanilla Perez was born on April 16, 1971, in Lake Jackson, Texas. Her father, Abraham Quintanilla, was born in Corpus Christi and was a former musician who performed with the doo-wop group Los Dinos during his teen years. Due to his background in music, Selena's father encouraged music in his family. Selena had two older siblings, Suzette Quintanilla, who played drums, and A.B. Quintanilla, who played the bass and guitar. When Selena was nine years old, her father encouraged his three children to form a band, calling them Selena y Los Dinos. Selena sang vocals and at the time did not speak Spanish. Her father encouraged her to learn to sing in Spanish and eventually she learned to speak fluently. In the early years of the band, Selena y Los Dinos performed mainly at the restaurant owned by their father. A.B. noted that the band first performed a mixture of English soft rock, such as the Eagles and Journey, and Tejano music.¹⁸ However, the band eventually only performed Tejano music. In 1981 the band was signed by Freddie Records and released their 1984 debut album *Selena y Los Dinos*. However, the record label did not believe the band could be successful in the Tejano market. As a result, Abraham decided to move the band to Cara Records, however no album was released. In 1983, the family restaurant closed due to the collapse of the Texas oil industry,

¹⁸ *Selena Remembered*, directed by Cecilia Miniucchi, (EMI Latin, 1997), accessed March 29, 2021, https://youtu.be/X_CjIKnyw3g.

resulting in the family moving to Corpus Christi and Selena y Los Dinos actively pursuing a career as a band touring throughout Texas.

1987 proved to be a monumental year for Selena y Los Dinos. Singer-songwriter Pete Astudillo and Joe Oyeda joined the band, and it was also the first year Selena won a Tejano Music Award, an award show based off of fan votes. By the end of her career, Selena won 35.¹⁹ The songwriters of the group were A.B. Quintanilla, who also produced the music, keyboardist Ricky Vela, and lyricist Pete Astudillo. In a 2019 interview, guitarist Chris Perez notes that Astudillo's talent as a lyricist changed the band as his music did not have the cliché rhyme schemes of earlier Tejano songs.²⁰ Anticipating a future career in the U.S. mainstream market, the band hired Chris Perez, a Mexican American rock guitarist, to add a rock flair to their sound in 1988.²¹ In 1992, Selena and Chris secretly married which brought division between the couple and Selena's family. However, eventually the family reconciled, and Chris was allowed back into the family band. EMI Latin music producer, Jose Behar first saw Selena after her performance at the 1989 Tejano Music Awards. He signed the band but insisted that the band's name be changed to just Selena as fans were drawn to her stage presence and presentation. In 1989 the band released their first record with EMI Latin, entitled *Selena*. By 1989 Selena y Los Dinos were preparing for a potential English contract as it was specified in their EMI Latin contract that music executive Jose Behar would help Selena create a crossover album in the future. Following the success of *Selena*, the band released their second album with EMI in 1990, *Ven Conmigo*.

¹⁹ "Past Tejano Music Award Winners," Accessed December 2, 2020, <https://www.tejanomusicawards.com/past-award-winners>.

²⁰ Chris Perez, interview by Rock James, "Chris Perez (2) how Pete Astudillo changes Los Dinos #PVT" (YouTube video), *My PVT Network*, April 29, 2019, accessed December 1, 2020, <https://youtu.be/2uWE18RA7Ms>.

²¹ Chris Perez, *To Selena, with Love* (New York: Penguin Group, 2012), 22-23.

1993 was a monumental year for the band as they won a Grammy for Best Mexican/Mexican American Album for their 1993 album *Selena Live*. Shortly after this monumental win as the first Tejano to win the category, SBK records signed a deal for Selena's English crossover album, which was planned to be released in 1995. In 1994 Selena released her all-Spanish album *Amor Prohibido*, which included cumbia hits such as "Bidi Bidi Bom Bom" and "Fotos y Recuerdos." In this same year Selena opened two *Selena etc.* boutiques which sold her fashion designs and also doubled as a hair and nail salon.

Early in 1995, Selena's life and career reached a tragic turn of events. On March 31, 1995 Selena was shot and killed by her fan club and clothing boutique manager Yolanda Saldivar. Their confrontation was due to Saldivar embezzling money. Selena met with Saldivar in Corpus Christi to receive tax documents which Saldivar refused to give and instead shot Selena during the confrontation. Saldivar then went in her car and threatened to kill herself during a standoff with police. After nine hours she was taken into custody. Reports of Selena's murder and the subsequent standoff were broadcast on U.S. television networks and introduced many to Selena. Selena's tragic death shocked the Tejano community and greater Latinx community. Much of Selena's memorabilia was sold out, and memorials were created in her honor. As a result, the non-Latinx American business executives became aware of the power of the U.S. Latinx market. On July 18, 1995, Selena's posthumous album *Dreaming of You* was released, selling 175,000 copies on its release day. Selena's death and the release of the 1997 biopic film *Selena* resulted in a Selena fandom that continues to this day.

My musical analysis of Selena y Los Dinos is centered around the band's last 3 studio albums before Selena's crossover album to the U.S. market, as these best represent the musical blend of Tejano, larger Latinx musical idioms, and American pop. Selena's earlier albums also

have hints of American influences, which would be a great direction for further study. I also analyze Selena's crossover album *Dreaming of You* to compare how she was marketed to a largely non-Latinx American audience.

The first two chapters analyze the musical sound of Selena y Los Dinos. In my first chapter I highlight the American pop musical influences on Selena y Los Dinos' sound and Selena's early performance image. Selena y Los Dinos were influenced by Black culture of the 1980s and 1990s and this is seen through the inclusion of hip hop and R&B into some of their songs on the albums *Ven Conmigo* and *Entre a Mi Mundo*. Other musical influences apparent are heard in the *Amor Prohibido* album with the inclusion of rock with the song, "Fotos y Recuerdos."

In Chapter 2, I analyze Selena's crossover album *Dreaming of You* and Selena's performance image as the sensual Latina with bedazzled bras and high-waisted pants. Within this chapter I argue that Selena's performance image, or "personaje," and personal image, or "persona," did not translate into her crossover album as well as it did in her earlier predominantly Spanish albums. Instead, American producers chose songs for Selena that had the non-Tejano listening population see her as sensual Latina with songs that sound like the typical Top 40 of the time. Through interviews and reception, I show the agency Selena brought to her look as she defended her hometown and humble roots before her death in 1995. She showed the Latinx population the freedom and agency one can have by using a performer image, or personaje and personal image, persona.

In Chapter 3, I explore Selena's current fandom. 2020 marked the 25th anniversary of Selena's death. Even long after her passing Selena continues to have a strong following, many fans have continued her legacy through online social media accounts. In this chapter I analyze

Selena's online fandom accounts and interview fans who run popular websites, social media accounts, and YouTube channels regarding Selena. I argue that Selena fans continue her legacy through digital fan labor because of their understanding of Selena as both a performer and a person, a dichotomy that is not understood by the greater American people.

Selena y Los Dinos embodied a Latinx American culture that many Latinxs at the time felt was not represented in popular media. Selena y Los Dinos mixed both Mexican and American culture to create an authentic and fresh sound for Latinx youth. Also important was Selena's agency and confidence in her performance image and self. Her humble roots and working-class Latina aesthetic created visibility to Latinas. Her legacy lives on through her family and her fans, who continue to advocate for Selena to be remembered not because of her music, or her beauty, but because of who she was.

Chapter 1

American Musical Influences on Selena y Los Dinos

Selena invented an image that historian Deborah Paredez described as “working-class Latina glamour.”²² She presented a good daughter/dangerous woman dichotomy while retaining her Tejana roots. Her image thus boldly contradicted the stereotypical view of Latinxs at the time. As Latinx theater scholar Paredez notes the 1990s was the decade of “Latin explosion,” the decade when “corporate marketing forces understood Latinxs as categories of potential capital at the same time that a resurgence of nativist discourse and sweeping immigration reforms saw Latinxs as a potential threat to national unity.”²³ Many U.S.-born Latinxs were ignored and not represented in popular media. Selena’s fame proudly exclaimed her Mexican American identity and resonated with U.S. Latinx youth.

Selena’s working-class Latina glamour was evident in the unique fusion of hip hop, R&B, and rock in Selena y Los Dinos’ music. Most analyses of Selena y Los Dinos shortchange the American musical influences apparent in their songs. Selena y Los Dinos gained popularity in both the U.S. and Mexico. I argue that Selena y Los Dinos did this through synthesizing the regional Tejano sound of conjunto and mariachi with cumbia and popular American musical genres, such as hip hop, R&B, and rock. My research fills the musicological gap regarding American musical influences on Selena y Los Dinos. To do this I will analyze the songs most exemplary of the U.S. musical influence from Selena’s predominantly Spanish albums of her

²² Deborah Paredez, *Selenidad: Selena, Latinos, and the Performance of Memory* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2009), 4.

²³ Paredez, *Selenidad*, 7.

early and mid-career: “Enamorada de ti,” “Missing my Baby,” and “Fotos y Recuerdos.” In addition to analyzing the songs, I will also examine live performances, which further describe and paint the modern sound and Mexican American personality of the band. Also apparent are her bold fashion style and dance moves, which were influenced by the most current and cool trends of the late 1980s and 1990s youth. Her choreography and fashion choices of the 1980s also show an affinity to Black musical culture, especially Janet Jackson. My musical analysis will combine Selena’s love for popular music with her group’s music and her own performance image.

It is without doubt that Selena was influenced by American popular music stars of her time. In a 1993 Spanish interview, she notes the influences of older rock artists such as A Taste of Honey, Michael Jackson, and Kiss when she was very young and learning to sing. Selena acknowledges that these bands influenced her earlier career as a young singer in Selena y Los Dinos. Within the same interview, she notes who she currently admires as an artist, particularly the Cuban American singer Gloria Estefan:

And now, I think it is, still Michael Jackson, Janet Jackson, Mariah, Whitney, artists like Gloria Estefan, we have to thank her because she opened the door for us, Hispanics. And she is helping us a lot because now well before, it was harder for us to enter the English market. But she, with her music, opened up the door for us Hispanics.²⁴

The success of Gloria Estefan contributed to the growing Latinx music scene in the 1980s through her success with hit Latin pop songs such as “Conga” and “Get on Your Feet.” Gloria Estefan was the first Latina pop artist to land on the Top 10 chart on Billboard’s pop, dance,

²⁴ Selena Quintanilla, “Selena Names her Biggest Influences” (YouTube video), Posted October 31, 2017, accessed December 2, 2020, <https://youtu.be/JSDP5B8WeJE>.

Black, and Latin charts simultaneously with her song “Conga.”²⁵ Marketing director for CBS International and the Miami Sound Machine, Sergio Rozenblat said the following in an interview with *The New York Times*, “We were lucky enough to hit on the sound that most of the Latin groups have been looking for and haven’t been able to translate. We’re using Latin roots, yet it’s arranged from an American point of view.” In the same interview Rozenblat commented on the American born Latin youth, “The record-buying public, the younger kids, they want to be considered American. They think in English. And we’ve become almost like an alternative.”²⁶ The bands blending of Latin roots with American Top 40 sound resulted in major success for Estefan. As Selena notes, Estefan’s success as a Latina pop artist broke ground for other aspiring Latina American singers and performers wanting to receive success in the American pop mainstream. Estefan, with her husband Emilio, helped other Latinx stars of the 2000s Latin music boom achieve crossover success, such as Shakira and Ricky Martin, with their company Crescent Moon Studios.²⁷

While Estefan opened the U.S. Latin pop scene there were still struggles for U.S. Latinx bands to work in the U.S. mainstream music industry. Selena y Los Dinos struggled to both represent their American and Mexican identity when working with music producers. In her characterization of Latin pop music in the 2000s, historian Maria Elena Cepeda writes, “Latino performers and other performers of color have had to contend with an industry that has historically and systematically categorized their music in opposition to an unmarked, white

²⁵ Horacio Sierra, “The Cuban-American Sound Machine: Nostalgia and Identity in the Music of Celia Cruz, Gloria Estefan, and Pitbull,” *International Journal of Cuban Studies* 10 (Winter 2018): 249, accessed February 17, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.13169/intejcubastud.10.2.0238>.

²⁶ Sergio Rozenblat, interviewed by Larry Brinbaum, “Miami Sound Machine Achieves A Crossover Dream,” *The New York Times*, February 16, 1986, accessed April 15, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/1986/02/16/arts/miami-sound-machine-achieves-a-crossover-dream.html>.

²⁷ Maria Elena Cepeda, *Musical ImagiNation: U. S-Colombian Identity and the Latin Music Boom* (New York: New York University Press, 2010, ProQuest Ebook Central), 41.

norm.”²⁸ But Selena y Los Dinos’ music before Selena’s crossover album demonstrates that their Tejano style was not traditional conjunto and contained conventional pop elements, revealing the dynamic nature of Mexican American youth of the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Selena’s style was largely influenced by Black superstar artists of the 1980s, such as Michael Jackson, Janet Jackson, and Tina Turner. However, the history of Black musical artists and mainstream popular music is also filled with inequities. Rhythm and blues artists were expected by music agents to be successful in the Black popular music market before listing their song on the pop music charts. Popular music historian Reebee Garofalo notes, “This curious method of determining popularity, which holds black artists to a higher standard of performance than white, reflects not only the character of record company marketing and promotion, but also radio and television programming, the packaging of live performances, and reportage in the music press.”²⁹ Similar inequalities were found in the Latinx music market of the late 1980s. EMI Latin required Selena y Los Dinos to be commercially successful in the Tejano music market before allowing them to release a U.S. mainstream crossover album.

One of the most obvious ways Selena demonstrated the influence of Black musical culture was by playing covers. For example, the band opened their 1995 Houston Astrodome show during the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo with a disco medley, a peculiar choice for a show in 1995 that is used to country and Tejano cumbias. The performance contained the Donna Summer songs “Last Dance” and “On the Radio” as well as “The Hustle,” “I Will Survive” and “Funkytown.” The covers, arranged by Selena y Los Dinos, kept the disco sound of the original songs through instrumentation and vocal style. Within the performance Selena mixed

²⁸ Cepeda, *Musical ImagiNation*, 57.

²⁹ Reebee Garofalo, “Black Popular Music: Crossing Over or Going Under?” in *Rock and Popular Music* (London, United Kingdom: Routledge, 1993), 235.

her Tejano background by hyping the crowd with spoken Spanish interjections between songs in her famous purple sparkly pantsuit. Some transitions between the songs also included Latin salsa and cumbia rhythms, allowing for Selena to dance Latinx dance styles such as salsa and her signature moves: The Funky Disco, The Bididi, and The Washing Machine.³⁰ She also performed dances popular in Black culture like the Electric Slide. Selena's affinity with Black culture reveals the complexity of the U.S. Latinx experience as well as the U.S. recording industry of the 1990s.³¹

“Enamorada de ti” and New Jack Swing

The 1990 album *Ven Conmigo* illustrates Selena y Los Dinos' ability to combine larger Latinx musical idioms and American R&B, particularly the song “Enamorada de ti.” New jack swing was popular from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s and is a fusion of R&B, hip-hop, and gospel vocals. The music is characterized by “swing” beats made by drum machines, such as the Roland TR-808. In new jack swing, a triplet swing rhythm is used with sixteenth notes.³² Popular new jack swing artists of the 1980s included Janet Jackson, Michael Jackson, Bell Biv DeVoe, and Boyz II Men.

A.B. Quintanilla and Ricky Vela specifically composed “Enamorada de ti” for Selena's 1990 performance at the TMAs to impress the American pop music executives being brought by EMI Latin executive Jose Behar. In the spoken linear notes for *Ven Conmigo*, A.B. explains:

³⁰ The following video demonstrates these three signature Selena dance moves. “3 Selena Dance Moves Every Fan Should Know,” posted by Dee Groove, YouTube video, posted May 5, 2017, accessed April 25, 2021, <https://youtu.be/IQ-bcUhlLRo>.

³¹ Deborah Paredez analyzes Selena's Houston Astrodome concert from February 26, 1995. She analyzes the opening “Disco Medley” and “Como La Flor.” Deborah Paredez, *Selenidad*, 31-55.

³² Richard J. Ripani, “The New Blue Music: Changes in Melody, Harmony, Rhythm, and Form in Rhythm & Blues, 1950- 1999” (Ph.D. The University of Memphis, May 2004), 208.

“Enamorada de ti” was our first attempt at doing something hip hop or R&B and the song really came out great. Originally my father had talked to Jose Behar and Jose had told him they were coming down to a show and they were bringing some major people from the pop market. So dad told Selena and told myself look this is a great opportunity for you guys to impress these people and possibly land an English contract.³³

The song was created specifically to try to grant Selena y Los Dinos an English record contract, which was always Selena’s dream. Therefore, the musical atmosphere and Selena’s performance image at her 1990 TMA performance reveal what the band believed would be eye catching to the American pop music executives.

“Enamorada de ti” follows the conventions of new jack swing, incorporating rapping and electronic swing beats; however, the song is innovative by including Spanish lyrics. Instrumentality the song contains a drum backbeat, synthesizer overlays, guitar, and R&B vocals. “Enamorada de ti” opens with the melody of the chorus played on synthesizers with a drum backbeat, overlaid is a funk syncopated rhythm with guitar. “Enamorada de ti” contains male backing vocals that repeat in a speech-like tone while the melody is sung by Selena and digitized in post-production. Innovative to the song is the addition of rapping by Selena, which is heard in the middle of the song after an instrumental section for a dance break. The inclusion of rapping follows the new jack swing influence in Selena y Los Dinos.

The influence of Black American culture was also apparent in Selena’s performance outfit, which she designed and created. Selena performed “Enamorada de ti” at the 1990 TMAs accompanied with a backing track and three backup dancers. With large late 1980s permed orange hair, she performed in a bedazzled leather pantsuit influenced by Janet Jackson. Figure 1 showcases a picture of Janet Jackson in her 1989 music video for “Rhythm Nation” and in her 1989 music video for “Miss You Much” set next to Selena’s 1990 TMA’s outfit. Selena merged

³³ A.B. Quintanilla, “Spoken Liner Notes By The Band And Family” in *Ven Conmigo* (EMI Latin, 1990).

both of Jackson's outfits into one, combining the chunky belt and black gloves of the "Rhythm Nation" outfit with the bedazzled jewels of Jackson's outfit in "Miss You Much." Selena's dance moves were also inspired by the choreography in Jackson's "Rhythm Nation". Selena's dance within the middle of the song, before her rap, was taken directly from the final dance break in Jackson's "Rhythm Nation" music video. Selena's rendition of the dance break involves the sharp and crisp arm and leg movements in "Rhythm Nation" choreographed by Anthony Thomas. The dance features a tight upper body, invoking an army-like strength. Selena's dance break invoked cheers from the crowd. Dance moves also evoked in her TMA performance showed influence of Black culture as she danced the latest hip hop dance moves of the early 1990s such as the Running Man, Robot, and Electric Slide.



Figure 1. Selena performing "Enamorada de ti" at the 1990 Tejano Music Awards (right), Janet Jackson's outfit in the music video for "Rhythm Nation" (middle), Janet Jackson's outfit in "Miss you much" (left).³⁴

Selena's and Janet Jackson's performing images were similar in that they both had to navigate between respectability and hypersexuality. Christine Capetola's claims that Janet Jackson, in her album *Control*, "sought to craft a sound that was unique to her. This goal was a

³⁴ Photograph by Eugene Adebari found in "Return to Rhythm Nation: 13 Times Janet Jackson Has Made History," *Eonline*, posted September 19, 2019, accessed March 30, 2021, <https://www.eonline.com/ap/news/1074565/return-to-rhythm-nation-13-times-janet-jackson-has-made-history>.

sonic Black womanhood that would amplify her lyrical narrations of life as a young Black woman.”³⁵ Jackson’s quest for control of her performance image and sound resulted in “a new kind of feminist affect that intertwined individual stories of endurance, the forcefulness of relatively new digital music technology, and Black and female collectivity.”³⁶ Jackson’s performance style greatly influenced Selena’s style and dance, as seen through her “Enamorada de ti” performance. Selena’s superstar image was like Jackson’s as she navigated creating an adult image for herself after a successful career as a child star. The dichotomy of Selena’s image and her crossover album will be further explored in chapter three.

Paredes highlights this demand “of authenticity placed on minoritarian communities and, in particular, on racialized female bodies.”³⁷ Both Janet and Selena worked to control their image and gain autonomy on how they dressed and portrayed themselves, an important feat as they both transitioned from child stars to adult performers. While Jackson’s search for control began in 1986 with her album *Control*, Selena’s search for control would occur from 1991 onward as she experimented with more provocative costumes and developed a signature dance style of cumbia and salsa. Selena’s admiration of Janet is best highlighted in her introduction when performing Michael Jackson’s song, “Billie Jean” in 1987. A young Selena introduces the song as, “Here’s a little song, by Janet Jackson’s brother.” While this introduction shows Selena’s sense of humor, it also reveals her recognition of Janet Jackson as an artist worthy of fame as herself, rather than just as Michael Jackson’s sister.³⁸

³⁵ Christine Capetola, “‘Gimme a Beat!’: Janet Jackson, Hyperaurality, and Affective Feminism,” *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 32, no. 4 (December 2020): 97, accessed January 27, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1525/jpms.2020.32.4.95>.

³⁶ Capetola, “Gimme a Beat!,” 95.

³⁷ Paredes, *Selenidad*, 13.

³⁸ Q Productions, “Selena – Billie Jean 1987” (YouTube video), posted by Rick Toth Selfanáticos, posted February 11, 2017, accessed February 2, 2021, <https://youtu.be/l6MrsfKxRY0>.

“Missing My Baby” and R&B

Selena y Los Dinos’ 1992 album *Entre A Mi Mundo* includes the song “Missing my Baby” which showcases the band’s R&B influences. *Entre A Mi Mundo* was Selena y Los Dinos third studio album and was recorded under EMI Latin. The album was released May 6, 1992 and was the first album to feature Selena’s husband and rock guitarist Chris Perez. The album consists of nine Spanish songs and one English song with genres ranging from cumbia to U.S. pop. Most linked to the band’s American identity is the only English song on the album, “Missing my Baby.”

“Missing my Baby” is a contemporary R&B ballad written by A.B. Quintanilla. However, EMI Latin encouraged A.B. to work with Brooklyn based R&B group and producers, Full Force. Full Force’s remixed version was included on the album and was also included in Selena 1995 album *Dreaming of You*. The verse-chorus ballad includes instrumentation of lead vocals, backing vocals, keyboards, and drums. The song opens with an electric backing track. The beginning and middle of the song includes a spoken section, a trademark of Selena that would be heard in later crossover songs on her 1995 album, *Dreaming of You*. Selena’s vocal style is like R&B singers of her time, with backup vocals sung by contemporary R&B group Full Force.

Selena’s vocal timbre and style in “Missing my Baby” differs from her approach in the Spanish language songs on *Entre A Mi Mundo*. To describe my understanding of Selena’s R&B vocal timbre and expression in “Missing my Baby” I will utilize the four part embodied comprehension described by music theorist Kate Heidmann in her article, “A System for

Describing Vocal Timbre in Popular Song.”³⁹ Within the verse of “Missing my Baby” Selena’s vocal folds have a regular vibration but there is some tension in her voice because of heavy vocal onsets on the consonants with glottal such as /t/ heard on the word “together.” However, her vocal timbre during the chorus contains regular phonation resulting in a calm, natural, and easy sound with a hint of breathiness. Throughout the song, but especially in the bridge Selena’s vocal timbre contains a “twang” due to the drawing of the tongue towards the back of the throat and raising the larynx. This is done for the belt-style singing at the end of the song which utilizes Selena’s upper range. Especially apparent in Selena’s vocal timbre is the positioning of her voice within the mask, or “singing in the mask.” Her R&B style of singing and nasality is quite different than her singing of mariachi style songs such as “Que Creias” or her Spanish pop cumbia, “Como la Flor”, both songs on the same album. Finally, Selena uses breath support and muscular anchoring to emphasize the general feelings of the song. Selena’s breath support consists of higher air pressure and airflow as the song progresses due to the key change of the song and the song’s higher notes in the chorus. Due to this, I hear the song as more passionate in the bridge than the chorus and verses.

³⁹ Kate Heidmann, “A System for Describing Vocal Timbre in Popular Song,” *Music Theory Online* 22, no. 1 (March 2016), <https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.16.22.1/mto.16.22.1.heidemann.php>.

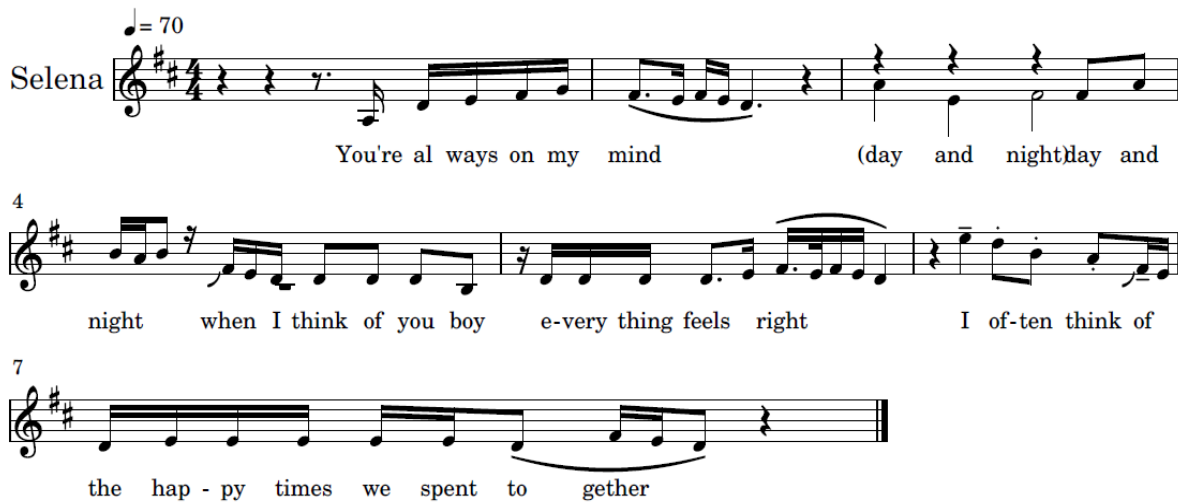


Figure 2. “Missing my Baby” first verse transcription.

Also important to Selena’s vocal delivery was her inclusion of vocal embellishments and ornamentations, which are transcribed in figure 2. Selena includes vocal scoops, runs, and staccati in the R&B song. For example, the line “when I think of you boy” begins with a vocal scoop up to f^\sharp . Within this same phrase she utilizes breathiness on the word “boy.” The inclusion of the vocal scoop and breathiness creates a sense of desperation and sensuality in Selena’s voice. Another line that importantly uses vocal embellishments is the line, “I often think of the happy times we spent together.” Within this vocal melody Selena includes a tenuto on the word “I” but immediately after uses staccati articulation for the descending line. This adds interest to the song while also incorporating virtuosity. Overall, Selena’s vocal techniques create a soulful R&B vocal sound that is different from her vocal style in the Spanish songs of *Entre A Mi Mundo*.

In contrast, the Spanish songs on the album *Entre A Mi Mundo* use different vocal timbre. For example, in the song “Que Creias” Selena sings in a mariachi style. The song depicts a woman singing to her past love, who has cheated on her but has come back expecting to continue

the relationship. Within the song she sings to the ex about how she has moved on and that her lover should not expect any other outcome. Within the song Selena uses regular vibration of the vocal folds to employ a healthy vibrato which displays strength in standing her ground in the interaction with her ex. Also heard in her vocal timbre is the “growl” which results from constricting the entire larynx. This affect shows the anger in Selena’s vocal timbre, especially on the word “así” in “Ya no haces falta aquí / Así es que puedes irte” (You’re not needed here anymore / So you can leave). The song’s lyrical content is reflected in a vocal timbre that demonstrates passion and strength. This is heard through Selena’s constant belting within the middle of the piece. Selena’s narrow pharynx, high larynx, and “megaphone” mouth configuration showcases strength, anger, pain, which are common characteristics needed to sing the lyrical themes of mariachi. Selena’s Spanish singing employed a healthy vibrato and belting, rather than the breathiness and sensuality of “Missing my Baby” to create a mariachi style in “Que Creías.” Selena developed multiple vocal timbres through her album *Entre A Mi Mundo*, showcasing her ability to match her vocal style to the eclectic array of genres on the album.

“Fotos y Recuerdos” and Rock

The 1994 album *Amor Prohibido* contains a greater variety of genres for Selena y Los Dinos than their past albums, such as cumbias, mariachi, hip-hop, and R&B. This album included some of Selena’s biggest Spanish hits as well, including “No Me Queda Más” and “Bidi Bidi Bom Bom.” The American-influenced songs on the *Amor Prohibido* album differ from past Selena y Los Dinos in that they all achieved monumental success in the Latinx musical mainstream and aimed to show the versatility of Selena’s voice in hopes of her crossover album with EMI Latin.

Music producer Cameron Randle claimed that cumbia enabled Selena y Los Dinos' success, "The cumbia is an entry...It's not necessarily required for the Tejano world. It is required to get beyond Texas...Cumbia's what opened the door for Selena...And it's considered the musical passport to Latin America."⁴⁰ Selena y Los Dinos' inventiveness to include the widely popular cumbia sound ultimately resulted in their international success and inspired subsequent Tejano grupos to include the cumbia in their songwriting. Cumbia was long apart of Mexican musical history before the 1980s and its relevance to Mexican American identity can be first found in the mid-20th century. Music historian Deborah Pacini Hernandez attributes this diversity in Mexican cumbia to the United States to both economic globalization and cultural explanations.⁴¹ According to Pacini Hernandez, economic factors dispersed cumbia into the U.S. included working-class Mexican immigrants affected by NAFTA entering the U.S. as well as Colombian and Peruvian immigrants immigrating due to diaspora caused by the violence of the international drug trade. Cultural factors include cumbia's spread in the 1950s and 1960s from Colombia to other Latin American countries, including Mexico. The traditional cumbia was of tri-ethnic origin, containing Black, European, and indigenous roots from the coastal region of Colombia. However, as cumbia expanded to the center of Colombia, the rhythm was simplified and Europeanized by eliminating many of the African polyrhythmic syncopations. While expanding further to other Latin American countries, the traditional cumbia changed, resulting in diverse styles of cumbia within Mexico alone. In Mexico, the cumbia was largely regarded as a working-class genre that eventually gained popularity in Tejano music and Selena y Los Dinos through Mexican immigration into the United States.

⁴⁰ Deborah Pacini Hernandez, *Oye Como Va!: Hybridity and Identity in Latino Popular Music* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2010), 123, accessed January 19, 2021, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1bw1j5k>.

⁴¹ Pacini Hernandez, *Oye Como Va!*, 138.

These influences are evident in the song “Fotos y Recuerdos,” a cover of the English pop song “Back on the Chain Gang,” originally released in 1983 by the English rock group The Pretenders. Selena y Los Dinos’ version of the song offers a way to see how they made a rock song sound Tejano. A.B. arranged “Fotos y Recuerdos” by adding a cumbia rhythm and had Ricky Vela write Spanish lyrics. The notated cumbia rhythm is transcribed in figure 3. The instrumentation contains keyboards, guitar, drums, bass guitar, violin, and vocals. The song contains a drastic lyric change, never stating the name of the original version, “Back on the Chain Gang” but rather “Fotos y Recuerdos (Photographs and memories).”

The song reveals that Selena y Los Dinos’ evolving music consisted of cumbia rhythms and soulful vocals with a rock flair. The song opens with a cumbia rhythm and guitar riff often backed by synthesizer, immediately distancing themselves from the niche Tejano genre they dominated and entering a more international Latin soundscape. Also not shown in the figure is the use of cowbell on beats 1-4. Figure 4 shows the original drum pattern in “Back on the Chain Gang” which follows a conventional rock drum pattern with emphasis on the backbeats. “Fotos y Recuerdos” received major success in both the U.S. and Mexico, peaking at number 1 on the Billboard US Hot Latin Songs, the Billboard US Regional Mexican Airplay, and the Billboard US Latin Pop Airplay charts. In 1995 “Fotos y Recuerdos” peak position was 2nd on the year end chart of the Billboard Hot Latin Tracks.⁴²

⁴² “Fotos y Recuerdos, Selena y Los Dinos,” *Billboard*, accessed December 2, 2020, <https://www.billboard.com/music/selena/chart-history/latin-songs/song/34249>.



Figure 3. Cumbia rhythm in “Fotos y Recuerdos.”



Figure 4. Drum pattern in “Back on the chain gang.”



Figure 5. On the left is a photo of 1983 cover art for the album *Learning to Crawl* by The Pretenders. The photo on the right is a 1993 cover art photo of the entire band, Selena y Los Dinos for the album *Quiero*.

Selena y Los Dinos added influences from American popular music and culture to Tejano music. Most of these earlier songs were all written by A.B., Astudillo, and Vela, however, by Selena’s crossover album, *Dreaming of You*, the songwriters of Selena y Los Dinos would not get to write an English song for the album. These earlier Spanish albums show the creativity and merging of the Mexican American youth of the 1980s and 1990s. These influences made Selena y Los Dinos a fresh and unique band for Tejano culture, allowing them to appeal and market to a younger audience. This also revealed the versatility and strength of the bicultural identity of

Tejanos, a strength U.S. music producers became fully aware of after the death of Selena in 1995.

As Selena progressed in her career, she found a balance between respectability and hypersexuality like Janet Jackson. From 1991 to 1995 Selena transitioned into her iconic look of performing in bedazzled brassieres and tight clothing. Selena's iconic woman of color working class aesthetic is an important performance identity to be studied. Her style created agency and freedom for other Latinas. Selena's humble and down to earth personality resulted in her being a role model to young girls, a dichotomy not understood by non-Latinx audiences when Selena was introduced to the wider public after her death in 1995. The next chapter explores this era of Selena's crossover and how the legacy of Selena, both performer and person, was understood following her death.

Chapter 2

Dreaming of Selena's Crossover

*“It just was at the verge of her doing what she actually dreamed of and I think that the album is perfectly titled *Dreaming of You*. All her English stuff that she recorded, ‘Captive Heart,’ ‘I’m Getting Used to You,’ ‘Dreaming of You,’ ‘Missing my Baby,’ I mean all those were just a taste of what she was about you know as a singer and an artist.”—Suzette Quintanilla⁴³*

Selena’s final album, *Dreaming of You*, chronicles a bittersweet moment in the Tejano’s career, as she would never get to see the success of her “dream.” The album was released the summer following Selena’s murder in 1995, which shocked the Latinx community both in the United States and abroad. Selena memorabilia and albums were sold out at rapid rates opening American producer’s eyes to the commercial power of the U.S. Latinx community.

Selena’s crossover album did not fit the mold she had expected when planning the album. Due to her death, the album only included five new English songs; the rest were Spanish songs from previous albums. The album also included some songs with a mix of both languages. Her album achieved immediate commercial success upon its U.S. release on July 18, 1995. In the first week the album sold 331,000 units and was the top Latin album on the Billboard Latin chart from August 8, 1995 to May 18, 1996. Due to the success of *Dreaming of You*, Selena became the second fastest-selling female artists in the U.S., the first being her idol Janet Jackson.

In his article on Latinx U.S. pop music “Will the Wolf Survive?” Steven Bender poses the following question, “In discussing the representation of culture by LatPop artist, one overarching question must be asked: whose ‘stories’ are being told?” He answers: “The

⁴³ Suzette Quintanilla, “Spoken Liner Notes by the Band and Family,” *Dreaming of You* (EMI, 1995).

American music industry—its executives, writers, and producers.”⁴⁴ Selena’s crossover album *Dreaming of You* falls into this trend. Selena’s English songs portray the industry’s belief on how Mexican American rising star Selena should be portrayed to a non-Latinx U.S. audience.

However, the second half of Selena’s album showcases her previous Spanish songs, which were produced by her brother and band and not Anglo American producers. The inclusion of Selena’s older songs showcases her “chica-del-barrio” charm, an unexpected and unintentional addition to her crossover album.

By studying Selena’s *Dreaming of You* album, I reveal the complicated nature of the “crossover” superstar in the context of an American Latina. I first highlight the history of the U.S. Latinx crossover star. The concept of “crossover” was complicated for Tejano artists like Selena, who had to fight for recognition in both the wider Latinx musical market and the U.S. market. I then highlight Selena’s crossover preparation leading up to her death and the *Dreaming of You* album release. Next, I analyze Selena’s own physical image as a performer by analyzing an interview with popular Spanish TV host Cristina Saralegui in 1994 where Selena describes the difference between her performance image, “personaje,” and her own personal image, “persona.” Following this I musically analyze the most popular English songs from *Dreaming of You*: “I Could Fall in Love” and “Dreaming of You.” In analyzing these songs, I argue that Selena’s working-class Latina image gave her sexual agency in Tejano, which was largely a male-dominated genre. Her English crossover, however, shows the commercialization of Selena’s image and portray her as the stereotypical sexual Latina and “Latin lover” to a largely misunderstanding white American audience.

⁴⁴ Steven W. Bender, “Will the Wolf Survive?: Latino/a Pop Music in the Cultural Mainstream,” *Denver U.L. Rev.* 78 (2001): 737, accessed October 18, 2020, <https://digitalcommons.law.seattleu.edu/faculty/357>.

History of Mexican American and Latinx American Crossover Artists

Crossover music artists have pervaded the United States music industry since the 1930s. Historian Reebee Garofalo defines crossover as the “process whereby an artist or a recording from a ‘secondary’ marketing category like country and western, Latin, or rhythm and blues achieves hit status in the mainstream or ‘pop’ market.”⁴⁵ Garofalo described the history of Black performers crossing over to the U.S. mainstream market as a standard of holding “black artists to a higher standard of performance than white.”⁴⁶ A similar inequity is found in Selena’s career. Before analyzing this higher standard placed on Selena by music producers due to her Tejana identity, I first highlight the history of crossover in Chicano and Latinx American artists from the 1950s to the 1980s.

Early Mexican American artists attempted to achieve success on the U.S. charts through assimilation. Ethnomusicologist Steven Loza describes the state of Mexican American musicians in the United States as a process of assimilation to Anglo American culture to reclamation of Mexican identity. The process of assimilation began in the 1950s and 1960s after many Mexican American World War II veterans chose to “Americanize” their U.S.-born children. Many Mexican American, or Chicano, musicians began to assimilate to the dominant musical idioms of the U.S., such as blues, R&B, rock, and jazz, many of which were created by African American musicians and appropriated by white artists. Chicano artists such as Cannibal and the Headhunters and Sunny and the Sunglows recreated the African American Motown sound, often singing in English and using R&B vocal inflections. Loza explains that while Chicanos were

⁴⁵ Reebee Garofalo, “Black Popular Music: Crossing Over or Going under?” In *Rock and Popular Music: Politics, Policies, Institutions*, ed. by Tony Bennett, et. al (London, UK: Routledge, 1993), 229.

⁴⁶ Horacio Sierra, “The Cuban-American Sound Machine: Nostalgia and Identity in the Music of Celia Cruz, Gloria Estefan and Pitbull,” *International Journal of Cuban Studies* (Vol. 10.2 Winter 2018): 249, accessed February 17, 2020, 235.

attempting to assimilate, none ever reached mainstream U.S. success, “Chicanos were attempting to fit into a national culture represented almost exclusively by white and black artists.”⁴⁷ Chicano artists who did receive national success often had to assimilate into U.S. culture, to the point of anglicizing one’s name, such as Ritchie Valens, known for his rock and roll hit “La Bamba,” who’s birth name was Richard Valenzuela.

Lack of mainstream musical success for Mexican American musicians in the 1950s and 1960s made Mexican Americans feel underrepresented in the predominately white American mainstream music and Hollywood culture. This underrepresentation continued into the 1990s. After the attempted assimilation of Mexican Americans in the 1950s and 1960s, a countermovement occurred in which Chicanos of the 1970s turned back to their Mexican roots in a “movement of reclamation of culture.”⁴⁸ One of the most notable musicians from this countermovement is Latin Rock guitarist Carlos Santana. Santana found remarkable success in the U.S. mainstream market. His 1970 album *Abraxas*, included hits such as “Oye Como Va” and “Black Girl Magic.” The album showed Santana’s musical fusion of American genres such as blues and rock with Latin rhythms.⁴⁹

Cuban American Gloria Estefan’s success as both part of the Miami Sound Machine and a solo artist emphasized the potential of Latinx music on the pop charts to recording companies in the 1980s. Latinx historian Horacio Sierra described Gloria Estefan’s sound as a “unique blend of American Top 40 structural sensibilities and tropical rhythms.”⁵⁰ Her sound contained

⁴⁷ Steven Loza, “Assimilation, Reclamation, and Rejection of the Nation-State by Chicano Musicians” in *Postnational Musical Identities: Cultural Production, Distribution, and Consumption in a Globalized Scenario*, ed. by Ignacio Corona, Alejandro L Madrid (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2008), 138.

⁴⁸ Loza, “Assimilation, Reclamation, and Rejection,” 140.

⁴⁹ Mark Brill, “‘Abraxas’—Santana (1970),” Library of Congress, posted 2015, accessed April 25, 2021, <https://www.loc.gov/static/programs/national-recording-preservation-board/documents/Abraxas.pdf>.

⁵⁰ Sierra, “The Cuban-American Sound Machine,” 249.

soft rock and dance music with a blend of Spanish and English, especially during her early career. Sierra argues that Estefan's musical style offered a "watered-down version of 'authentic' music" for Anglo American popular music audiences, a practice that had often been done with artists such as Elvis Presley and Bon Jovi.⁵¹ Estefan's success opened up possibilities of Selena, who also had a superstar persona. Also similar was the Estefan's and Quintanilla's drive to create their own producing companies, creating agency for themselves in a predominantly Anglo American dominated U.S. music industry. However, Selena's musical identity differed from Estefan in that she represented the Mexican American community. She also was born in the United States and was a third-generation Mexican American.

Selena's Crossover

Selena's Tejana identity placed her in a relatively niche musical market that struggled to find recognition in both the Mexican and U.S. mainstream music markets. Tejano acts were often subject to lower pay than both white musical acts and musical acts from Mexico when it came to playing at larger venues in Texas, such as the Astrodome.⁵² Upset about the injustice, Abraham Quintanilla planned a walkout of Tejano groups who used Pace Concerts, the promoters who were not giving equal pay to the Tejano acts.⁵³ The walkout shows the complicated view and injustice of Tejano acts in the United States.

Selena's record company, EMI Latin, would not allow Selena to pursue her dream of crossing over to the American popular music scene until she achieved success in the Latin market. However, this market proved incredibly difficult to find success in, as it was defined by

⁵¹ Sierra, "The Cuban-American Sound Machine," 250.

⁵² The Houston Astrodome, or NRG Astrodome, is a large venue in the Houston, TX that seats about 66,000 people. In Tejano culture, the venue is most well-known for hosting the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo, which it hosted from 1966 to 2002.

⁵³ Joe Nick Patoski, *Selena: Como La Flor* (Berkley, CA: Berkley Bouleva, 1997), 117-118.

the record industry as all Latin American countries as well as Mexico and the U.S. Latinx audience, which consisted of different cultures and musical subgenres. Even as Selena achieved success in the Latin market, EMI Latin would still not sign her to a mainstream album. Agent Jose Behar describes the story as follows:

EMI had led all of us to believe that she would record in English and it just wasn't materializing, for whatever reason people don't believe they didn't think it could happen. One day we were eating Thai food across the street from Capitol Records and in the middle of the meal she starts to cry, and she was a regular joker, so I thought okay she's setting up the next joke, but she was really crying for real. She said Jose I've told half the world I've got an English record coming and there is no English record. She was right and it really upset me, and I remember going to the chairman of EMI music and if he sees this for the first time, he'll know that I lied to him. I said Selena is ready to sign a deal elsewhere if we don't do it here, she's out and 24 hours later the power that be were in LA signing her to an Anglo deal.⁵⁴

Behar's interview shows the difficulty of Tejano artists to find support from white American music producers. While Selena worked hard to grow her fanbase in Latin America, her musical style of both U.S. urban music tied with traditional Tejano was difficult for music producers to grasp. Many music producers at the time did not think the U.S. Latinx fanbase was large enough to produce competitive sales. This lack of sufficient data could be due to independent Tejano record stores not reporting to SoundScan, a computerized music retail sale tracking data resource which was incorporated into Billboard's chart formulations in 1991. After the incorporation of SoundScan in 1991, country, R&B, and hip hop artists received higher rankings on the top album and singles charts.⁵⁵ This showed the commercial power and success of these genre industries which was misrepresented on charts before online data tracking. Selena's success following her

⁵⁴ "Selena Queen of Tejano," YouTube video, posted by LaLeyendaSelena, 18:57, posted October 28, 2012, accessed March 17, 2021, <https://youtu.be/dpyXUT-VrOk>.

⁵⁵ John P. Kellogg, "The Urbanization of the 'Billboard' Top Album and Singles Charts: How SoundScan Changed the Game," *MEIEA Journal* 12, no. 1 (2013): 45-59, accessed April 25, 2021, <https://search.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/urbanization-billboard-top-album-singles-charts/docview/1519295538/se-2?accountid=8361>.

death would open the eyes of the predominantly Anglo American producers and media, partially through adequate tracking of her album sales in the U.S. mainstream charts.

Selena's Image as a Performer

In 1994, Selena was interviewed on the Spanish talk show *El Show de Cristina*.⁵⁶ Cristina Saralegui specifically questions Selena regarding her image, claiming that women consider Selena's look to be "descarada" or cheeky. To this accusation Selena replied, "But its acting, when someone is singing and it's a part of the show, its acting, and I am not like that normally. I dress like this [motioning at current outfit], like this covered. They are two totally different persons."⁵⁷ Following this answer Cristina furthered asked Selena to clarify if it was the difference between a "persona" and "personaje," or person and character, to which Selena replied "yes." Within the same interview, Selena claimed she found the term "sexy" to be subjective and that she did not view herself that way. This interview offers a look into Selena's own view of her stage image verses her personal image.

Selena's performance image or "personaje" was often misunderstood by both Latinx and non-Latinx audiences. However, her working-class Latinx fans found her performance character to be empowering and amiable. Particularly because Selena fans knew Selena beyond her performance image through her humble personality shown in interviews and fan greetings. Selena did not always maintain a glamorous look as she often dressed in jeans, a t-shirt, and a low bun when shopping in her hometown of Corpus Christi.⁵⁸ She would also sometimes change

⁵⁶ "Selena Quintanilla Perez Christina Interview," YouTube video, posted by John Wood, 18:32, posted March 30, 2013, accessed March 16, 2021, <https://youtu.be/VgWBKflgnyo>.

⁵⁷ "Pero es como actuando, quando una persona esta cantando es como parte de un show, es actuando y yo no soy así normalmente, así viste, así cubierto. Son dos personas totalmente diferente."

⁵⁸ Samantha Chavarria, "Selena Quintanilla's Sister Says the Dress Scene from the Movie Sadly Wasn't Just a Story," Mitú, July 31, 2019, accessed March 25, 2021, <https://wearemitu.com/entertainment/that-iconic-dress-shopping-scene-from-selena-really-did-happen-but-not-in-the-way-we-thought/>.

into sweats, sneakers, and a large sweatshirt for interviews, as seen in her interview with a local Texas reporter while touring her family's soon-to-be music production studio. During the interview, she wore a large black Planet Hollywood sweatshirt, sweats, and white sneakers, and she tells the reporter, "When I'm not performing, and I don't have to do special TV things I like to be like this [showcases outfit] relaxed just like anyone else" showcasing her down to earth side of her personality.⁵⁹

Selena's sexy personaje was a part of her performance character as a young Tejana artist in a male-dominated genre. However, her personaje as the sexy Latin lover would be used in her crossover English albums as well. Ethnomusicologist Manuel Peña described this dichotomy as a "collision between two disparate cultural economies."⁶⁰ He later went on to describe Selena's as a paradox writing, "In many ways, she still played the role of the imaginary working-class Mexican American girl who obeyed her parents, practiced good manners, and endorsed the 'wholesome lifestyle' of Mexican American culture."⁶¹ This description fits my analysis of Selena's persona. Peña also wrote about Selena's sexual personaje, claiming that EMI Latin and marketers exploited Selena's sexuality after her death. However, Peña does not take into consideration the fact that Selena found pride and joy in creating her own fashion designs. Her designs fit into working-class Latina glamour and also the music commodity market that commercialized sex and glamour. Selena's fashions designs and her personaje gave agency to Selena as her singing business was a family-run matter but her fashion business was run by her.

⁵⁹ "Selena shows her new recording studio," YouTube video, posted by Selena World, 1:21, posted July 21, 2018, accessed March 17, 2021, <https://youtu.be/RBJquEhOZXQ>.

⁶⁰ Manuel H. Peña, *Música Tejana: The Cultural Economy of Artistic Transformation* (College Station, TX: Texas A & M University Press, 1999), 207, accessed March 31, 2021, EBSCOhost.

⁶¹ Peña, *Música Tejana*, 206

By creating fashion designs and starting her *Selena Etc.* boutique, Selena was able to gain control over her future career, a feat that many young Latina fans admired.

The English songs in Selena's crossover album do commercialize Selena's sexuality, as Peña suggests. Steven W. Bender's 2001 article on "Will the Wolf Survive?: Latino/a Pop Music in the Cultural Mainstream" documents the Latinx pop music star at the turn of the century. While the article does not cover Selena's era, mentions of her are incorporated into the article. Bender writes that Latinx artist were largely stereotyped as "the Latin lover." However, he writes that Mexicans and Mexican Americans do not share the exotic mystique of Caribbean-based Latinx pop stars, as Mexico's "immigration history may position them as more of a national threat—one to be repelled rather than commodified."⁶² However, by analyzing Selena's crossover English songs, I argue that Selena was also portrayed as the Latin lover but with a good girl subordinate image, regardless of her Tejano identity.

Selena's Performative Image in her English Crossover Songs

Selena's image challenged the norms of the predominantly male Tejano music scene by utilizing female sexuality in her performance character while simultaneously marketing a girl-next-door image through her nonperformance character. Selena often performed in full-face makeup while wearing bedazzled brassieres and tight pants. Her look was often juxtaposed with the way she lived her life, which was a humble girl next door, as she lived next door to her parents and married her first boyfriend at the age of 20. Historian Vargas described Selena's performance look as one that portrayed "confidence, sensuality, and sexuality" to create a

⁶² Bender, "Will the Wolf Survive," 728.

“powerful place and notoriety not many Tejano singers before her had attained.”⁶³ Her style was described as a voluptuous “woman of color working-class aesthetic” by theater scholar Paredez. Selena’s duality as a sensual Latina and humble girl next door gives her a sense of agency over her image. Selena is able to choose which image she would like to appeal to both the older and conservative Latinx community as well as younger Latinx fans.

I argue that these combined descriptions of a sensual Latina working-class aesthetic described Selena’s own image. However, both “I Could Fall in Love” and “Dreaming of You” commercialize Selena’s image as the stereotypical sexual personaje Selena while disregarding her as the working-class and humble persona as there was no way to know this aspect of her life unless you were aware of her personal image through interviews and her Spanish music. Selena’s crossover songs sounded like a typical American Top 40 song with only the inclusion of spoken Spanish lyrics. Selena’s “Latin lover personaje” is revealed through the chordal structure of the songs, the inclusion of spoken Spanish but not singing, and the English lyrical content.

Dreaming of You and Selenidad

Scholar Deborah Paredez coined the term “Selenidad” to describe the “generative (after)life of its own” that came about following the death of Selena in 1995.⁶⁴ Paredez notes that it was “over Selena’s dead body that the Latin Boom exploded.”⁶⁵ This boom included magazines, murals, a musical, a Hollywood biopic, and much more was first catapulted by the release of Selena posthumous album *Dreaming of You*. This album, which was the cumulation of her lifelong musical dream, showed the U.S. corporate market forces the power of the growing

⁶³ Deborah R. Vargas, *Dissonant Divas: The Limits of La Onda in Chicana Music* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 185.

⁶⁴ Deborah Paredez, *Selenidad: Selena, Latinos, and the Performance of Memory* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2009), 7.

⁶⁵ Paredez, *Selenidad*, 7.

Latinx community in the United States. Selena's introduction into the predominantly white U.S. music market was bolder than anticipated because *Dreaming of You* included Spanish Tejano songs from Selena's past albums.

Dreaming of You contained an eclectic array of styles and showcased both Selena's American urban musical side, through R&B, hip hop, and U.S. pop, and her Tejano roots, through mariachi and cumbia. This fusion resulted in greater representation of Mexican American culture than was originally planned by the white American label producers. Chicano studies historian Deborah R Vargas interviewed A.B. regarding the eclectic sound of Selena y Los Dinos and his continuation of the sound with his band Kumbia Kings. In the interview, A.B. states, "I had a year [after Selena's death] to rethink the music. The sound of the Kumbia Kings is the sound Selena would have evolved to. I had to find the fine line where the cumbias ended, and the urban stuff began."⁶⁶ Selena's crossover album showcases this possibility of the Mexican American landscape when not hindered by the constraints of white American music producers. On the album, Selena was able to showcase to the public the true Tejano sound. The English songs "I Could Fall in Love" and "Dreaming of You" reveal the commercialization of Selena's Tejana image and how Latinas were perceived.

"I Could Fall in Love" showcases how American producers wanted to portray Selena as an English-speaking crossover star. Within the form of a pop ballad with a moderate tempo, the song showcases both Selena's R&B influence as well as her sensual personage. "The song begins with a drum machine, synthesized flute and piano accompaniment, and guitar. The song also includes violins and occasional male and female backup singers. The song is in E major but

⁶⁶ Vargas, *Dissonant Divas*, 198.

creates a dreamy state through the use of a G[#] major (III) chord within the chorus, shown in figure 1.

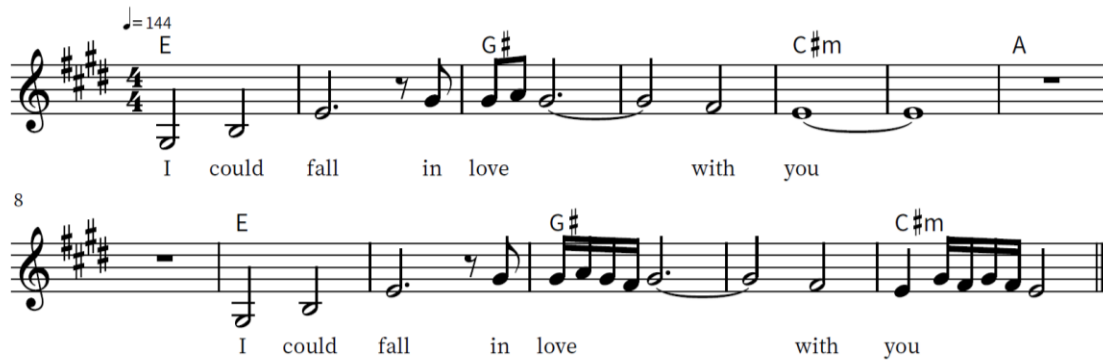


Figure 6. “I Could Fall in Love” vocal line transcription.

The chord changes and use of lyrics emphasize Selena’s pop star image as a sensual but good girl-next-store Latina. The sensual and intimate nature of the song is reinforced through the use of G[#] Major (III) but also through the lyrical choices of the songs. The G[#] major chord functions as the V to the C[#] minor chord. The use of the secondary dominant creates a pulling feeling to the resolution in the lyrics, “love with you.” This chordal movement further exaggerates Selena’s wishful and dreamlike fantasies of love. The song emotionally depicts the heartbreak of a woman after being in love with a man. The lyrics “‘Cause the way I feel I might lose control and let you stay” and “I can only wonder how, touching you would make me feel” further play on Selena’s depiction as sensual women tangled with a hometown good girl persona. These lyrics combine the sexual nature of the woman while simultaneously placing her as one who will not give in to her temptation of letting her crush know how she feels for fear of “losing control.”

Selena’s identity as a sensual Latina with working-class glamour is commercialized and stereotyped with the inclusion of Spanish spoken lyrics in the bridge of the song. The bridge

begins with lyrics sung in English. Selena's showcases the higher end of her range while making her final decision on not confronting her crush with her feelings, with the lyrics, "And I know it's not right / But I guess I should try to do what I should do." The bridge then transitions into a section of Spanish spoken lyrics that depicts the woman's dream of being with the man she is infatuated with. Within this section, Selena's voice is accompanied by the drum machine and synthesizer piano. However, this section moves away from the use of the G[#] Major chord and switches to an alternation between G[#]m (iii) and F[#]m (ii), creating an ambiguous dreamlike section due to the movement away from the E major tonal center. This combined with Selena's Spanish lyrics, which are spoken in a sensual whisper, create a dreamlike exotic space. The bridge then climatically ascends to the chorus through ascending violins and brings the listeners back to the tonal center of E major through a IV – V – I cadence. This movement back to E major is centered around the lyrics, "So I should keep this to myself, and never let you know." To the predominantly white U.S. audience, the bridge depicts Selena as one with hidden sensual thoughts surrounding her crush. This is juxtaposed with the English lyrics and tonal center of E major, which depict Selena as the girl next door who will keep her feelings to herself. This second bridge continues the American stereotype of the sexual Latina.

G [#] m	F [#] m
Siempre estoy soñando en ti	I'm always dreaming of you
G [#] m	F [#] m
Besando mis labios, acariciando mi piel	Kissing my lips, caressing my skin
G [#] m	F [#] m
Abrazándome con ansias locas	Hugging me with crazy longings
G [#] m	
Imaginando que me amas	Imagining that you love me
F [#] m	
Como yo podía amar a ti	The way that I could love you

“I Could Fall in Love” may sound like a typical pop love song. However, the inclusion of Selena’s spoken voice with Spanish lyrics reveals how Selena’s “voluptuous” and sensual good girl image was portrayed to the American public by the white-controlled music label. Bender writes, “This phenomenon of Latino/a singers achieving commercial success in English-Only reflects the unwillingness of the American public to accept Spanish as a legitimate language of cultural communication.”⁶⁷ To most 1990s non-Latinx listeners, the Spanish section may sound just as incomprehensible Spanish. However, the musical landscape underneath and the producer’s decision to include Spanish paints a picture of Selena as the stereotypical sexual Latina.

The title track of Selena’s album, “Dreaming of You,” often invokes emotional responses due to Selena’s tragic death. The song was used in the closing scene of the 1997 movie *Selena* directed by Gregory Nava.⁶⁸ Within the scene Selena, played by Jennifer Lopez, performs “Dreaming of You” in an empty performance hall. After performing the song, she sees one white rose on the floor of the stage. This immediately cuts to reenactments of Selena’s death in a news story fashion. Also within the emotional scene is the crying and mourning of her family, crowds of fans who attended vigils the night of her death, and a montage of Selena’s photos and videos.⁶⁹ Through the movie’s visuals, the chorus of the song eerily moves from a girl singing about her lover, to mourning fans and family mourning and dreaming of Selena.

“Dreaming of You” is particularly unique because it was the only English song Selena could pick for her crossover album. Every other song was chosen by the music producers to

⁶⁷ Bender, “Will the Wolf Survive,” 725.

⁶⁸ *Selena*, directed by Gregory Nava (Warner Brothers, 1997), accessed March 25, 2021, <https://www.amazon.com/Selena-Jennifer-Lopez/dp/B001AWDF18>.

⁶⁹ *Selena*, directed by Gregory Nava (Warner Brothers, 1997).

carefully craft an album that the majority Anglo American audience would buy.⁷⁰ “Dreaming of You” reveals the pop musical sound Selena envisioned for herself. Selena was especially excited about the song as she eagerly called her husband during the recording session to come listen to the track. The song was originally written by Franne Golde and Tom Snow for the R&B group The Jets. The song is a pop ballad but contains Selena reciting Spanish lyrics within it.

The ballad shows the merging of Selena’s Tejana identity with the mainstream U.S. pop sound. Like “I Could Fall in Love,” the song contains a break down section about halfway into the song. This section contains a vocal repetition of Selena singing “I can’t stop dreaming of you.” Interwoven on the offbeats between this sung line are interjections of Selena seductively speaking in Spanish. While the song is strongly a mainstream pop song, Selena boldly introduces her Tejana identity through Spanish lyrics. Notated in figure 7 this duet section includes both sung English lyrics and spoken Spanish. However, in Selena’s English songs she never sings in Spanish. Rather the spoken Spanish creates a sensual and exotic space that is never elevated to the status of singing like the English vocal lines. The Spanish lyrics are also cliché love lines that never translate into any of the English lyrics in “Dreaming of You.”

⁷⁰ A.B. Quintanilla, “Spoken Liner Notes by the Band and Family,” *Dreaming of You* (EMI, 1995).

Figure 7 shows a musical score for the bridge of the song "Dreaming of You" by Selena. The score is written for Selena's vocal line and a Spoken Poetry line. The tempo is marked as 82. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats). The time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are in English and Spanish. The chords are Gbmaj7 Ab, Ebm9, Db, EbAb, Ebm9, Gbmaj7 Ab, Ebm9, Db, EbAb. The lyrics are: Hah, I can't stop dream-ing of you, co-ra-zón, no pue-do de-jar de, I can't stop dream-ing, pen-sar de ti, có-mo te ne-ce-si-, I can't stop dream-ing of you, to, Mi a-mor, có-mo te ex-tra-ño.

Figure 7. Transcription of the bridge in "Dreaming of You."

Selena's death and posthumous crossover album revealed to the predominantly white U.S. music market the power of the Latinx community. Selena's *Dreaming of You* received critical reviews from magazines such as *Rolling Stone* showing a disconnect between the Latinx community's admiration for Selena and the American white establishment. For example, Eddy Chuck's *Rolling Stone* review begins with Selena's voluptuous sensual working-class glamour, however he is baffled that Selena's personaje would equate to a role model since he is unaware of her "persona." "[Selena] loved dressing skimpily onstage so you could see her navel and cleavage. But she was still wholesome enough to be praised as a role model for Latina teens."⁷¹ However, her music itself is described as "fairly generic...give or take some whispered Spanish-seduction nothings at the end."⁷² Eddy Chuck's *Rolling Stone* review shows that Selena's

⁷¹ Eddy Chuck, "Dreaming of You Selena EMI," *Rolling Stone*, September 7, 1995, 72.

⁷² Chuck, "Dreaming of You Selena EMI," 72

confident and admiring sexual working-class aesthetic image was lost from the predominantly white U.S. music audience. Her Spanish lyrics were also not understood and taken as “Spanish seduction nothings.”

Even local Texas newspapers notated how Selena’s crossover English songs did not showcase her “chica-del-barrio charm.” For example, *Dallas Morning News* music critic Mario Tarradell notes that in Selena’s English songs, her Tejano small town girl image, or persona, had been erased. “In its place, we get breathy, love struck vocal performances that sound like tepid imitations of Amy Grant or Paula Abdul.”⁷³ When describing Selena’s “I Could Fall in Love” the inclusion of Spanish lyrics into the song is described by Tarradell as whispered “sweet nothings in Spanish during the song’s midpoint break.” However, Tarradell notes that Selena’s legacy does not live on through her crossover album but in her Spanish albums released prior such as *Selena Live* and *Amor Prohibido*. Whereas Eddy Chuck is not familiar with Tejano culture and could not reference Selena’s Spanish music. His unfamiliarity with the culture and harsh criticism of the album is an example of the difficulty Selena faced in promoting her Tejano musical sound in the U.S. musical mainstream culture.

Selena’s sexual image allowed her to give agency and power to herself beginning in a predominantly male-dominated Tejano market and was admired by the Latinx community. While continuing her performance image Selena still kept her persona separate. Selena showed agency over her body and image and was able to create enormous success for herself. She also continued to advocate for her hometown and Tejano community. Regardless of her success Selena never stopped advocating for her hometown of Corpus Christi and the children there, as seen through

⁷³ Mario Tarradell, “New album hints at what might have been – Selena,” *Dallas Morning News*, July 28, 1995, 24, <https://news.google.com/newspapers?id=uPhTAAAAIBAJ&pg=3757,5994881&dq=the+first+single+i+could+fall+in+love+is+a+mundane+ballad+embellished+with+that&hl=en>.

her stay in school local campaigns. For example, Selena created a video titled, “Mi Musica, Mexican American Music of Today” which was played in local South Texas schools. Within the educational video Selena taught the history of Mexican American music while also emphasizing the importance of staying in school and graduating high school.⁷⁴ Selena created a confident image for herself as a brown skinned dark-haired Latina, resulting in her being a role model for Latina teens.⁷⁵

While Selena did not live to see the success of her English crossover album, *Dreaming of You* revealed the power of the Latinx community both culturally and commercially. Selena’s *Dreaming of You* album received remarkable success. The album peaked at number 1 on August 4, 1995, on the U.S. Billboard 200 and was on the chart for 49 weeks. The album peaked on the Top Latin Album Billboard Chart on August 5, 1995, and would continue to be number one on the chart for a remarkable 106 weeks.⁷⁶ Due to the circumstances of the album’s release, the U.S. mainstream market was introduced to an unapologetically Tejano superstar whose “voluptuous style was a part of her women of color working class aesthetic.”⁷⁷ Both Selena’s personaje and persona would go on to capture the hearts of U.S. and Latinx fans for generations to come.

Selena’s performance image as a working-class Latina was continued on through Jennifer Lopez in her marketing as “Jenny from the block” as her singing career launched in 1999 after playing Selena in the 1997 *Selena* biopic. Selena’s impact after her death and her memorialization created a large fanbase of Selena fans, many of whom were Latinx. For

⁷⁴ “Selena Quintanilla Perez – Stay in School (Remastered),” YouTube video, posted by John Wood, 0:29, posted March 30, 2013, accessed March 16, 2021, <https://youtu.be/-fuzfTS2KJw>.

⁷⁵ *Corpus: A Home Movie for Selena*, directed by Lourdes Portillo (Women Make Movies, 1999), accessed March 25, 2021, <https://www.kanopy.com/product/corpus-0>.

⁷⁶ “Dreaming of You Selena” *Billboard*, accessed March 16, 2021, <https://www.billboard.com/music/selena/chart-history/LCM/song/176383>.

⁷⁷ Paredez, *Selenidad*, 38.

example, the young actress and singer Selena Gomez was named Selena because of her parent's love for Selena Quintanilla Perez. Non-Latinx artists have been remarkably influenced by Selena's personaje and style of dress, with many popular media outlets noting times that American celebrities such as Beyoncé and Katy Perry have employed similar fashion choices, such as Selena's famous purple sparkled pantsuit and black bedazzled bustier.⁷⁸ The strong commercialization of her image led to a resurgence of her popularity, the most recent being in 2020 with the release of *Selena: The Series* on Netflix which has catapulted a new Latina, Christian Serratos, into the spotlight for portraying Selena. Selena's popularity and legacy continues on in her fans today who know and love Selena for her humble and authentic persona.

⁷⁸ Liz Calvario, "12 Times Celebs Borrowed Selena Quintanilla's Look," *ET*, last modified September 15, 2018, accessed March 16, 2021, <https://www.etonline.com/12-times-celebs-borrowed-selena-quintanillas-look-88337>.

Chapter 3

Selena Quintanilla Perez's Digital Fandom

A popular saying in Selena fandom, drawn from the 1997 *Selena* movie, is “Anything for Selenas.” In the film Selena’s tour bus is driven into a ditch on the side of the highway and two characters, known as “first and second cholo,” appear in a red convertible and offer help. When helping try to pull the bus out of a ditch the back bumper of the convertible is pulled off. Rather than being angry the “first cholo” character exclaims, “Are you kidding me man this bumper is going to go on the wall of my garage, carnal, I’m going to put a little sign that says, ‘This bumper was pulled off by the bus of Selenas.’” He then bashfully tells Selena, “I mean, anything for Selenas.”⁷⁹ This saying has become a staple in Selena fandom and has even been printed on shirts. The fandom spirit and love for Selena seen in the cholo character continues in Selena fans. Fans will do anything for Selena, with some even exclaiming when I thanked them for agreeing to interview, “Anything for Selena!” While the saying is playful part of Selena fandom, it also reveals the deep love for Selena, self-aware excess, and insider knowledge Selena fans have in their community through the exchanging of these popular culture phrases.

Selena’s legacy continues in a digital archive space coined by journalist Maria Garcia as “Selena’s Internet.”⁸⁰ This culture is perpetuated not only through Selena’s family business, Q-Productions, but also through the creation and posting of Selena fandom accounts online. Selena fans have navigated and evolved with the digital world since their idol’s passing in 1995. Today,

⁷⁹ *Selena*, directed by Gregory Nava (Warner Brothers, 1997), accessed March 25, 2021, <https://www.amazon.com/Selena-Jennifer-Lopez/dp/B001AWDF18>.

⁸⁰ Maria Garcia, host, “Selena’s Internet,” Anything for Selena (Podcast), *NPR*, accessed April 8, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/podcasts/923101875/anything-for-selena>.

Selena's fandom consists of thousands of Selena social media tribute accounts, encompassing many popular social media platforms. Fans share and celebrate Selena's legacy and create a space that new fans can learn about Selena and make connections with other fans. The use of the internet has united Selena fans more than ever before. Selena fan gatherings occur not only in Texas but throughout the United States. Many fans keep in contact with each other through social media to stay updated on the latest memorabilia launch and Quintanilla family meet and greet events. Important to the resurgence of Selena fandom was the 2018 announcement by Netflix of the show *Selena: The Series* produced by Campanarios Entertainment and the Quintanilla family. The series' first season aired on December 4, 2020 and the second season is set to air on May 4, 2021. The show spent its first week at #1 on the Netflix top ten list and was watched by 25 million households for the first 28 days after its debut.⁸¹

To explore the unusual relationship between Selena and her fans, I conducted one-on-one interviews with Selena fans who run digital tribute accounts online including websites, Facebook pages, Instagram accounts, and YouTube channels. Fans continue to remember Selena through digital fan labor, which consists of the creation of online tribute accounts and through showcasing their commercial power by buying Selena memorabilia and petitioning for new memorabilia to be made. I examined how fans first became acquainted with Selena and why they decided to start their accounts. Many fans were first introduced to Selena after her death in 1995. Fans found themselves drawn to Selena after hearing her music on the radio and watching the 1997 biopic *Selena*. Fans articulated their desire to create fandom accounts because of their love of Selena's personality. They learned more about Selena and her biography, they felt she was an

⁸¹ Peter White, "'Selena: The Series': Netflix Reveals Viewing Data for Latin Original Ahead of Part 2," Deadline, posted January 15, 2021, accessed April 25, 2021, <https://deadline.com/2021/01/selena-the-series-netflix-reveals-ratings-data-1234674507/>.

artist worth supporting and remembering. While it has been 26 years since Selena's death, her digital fandom has similarities to fandoms of living artists who maintain a transcultural fan base. Unlike those groups, however, Selena's fans carry a torch for Selena's legacy and remembrance. Selena's fans utilize digital fan labor, a term first created by media and cultural scholar Jeremy Morris, to keep her presence alive, much in the way current artists use digital fan labor to gain relevance in the digital world.⁸²

Selena fans continue to remember Selena because of her persona, which was hardworking, entrepreneurial, family-oriented, and generous with fans. The qualities she represented has led them to want to continue to share Selena through digital fan labor. The commercial power of her fans, who are deeply invested into who Selena was, is what continues Selena's relevance and prevalence in popular culture today.

Documenting Selena's Fandom

Scholarship on Selena has focused primarily on the commercialization of Selena's image following her death. Mexican American essayist Ilan Stavans first analyzed the commercialization of Selena's image in 1996. Traveling to South Texas, Stavans interviewed Selena fans about grieving Selena's death. Even before the release of the 1997 biopic *Selena*, Stavans foreshadowed the success of the upcoming movie,

As long as *la frontera* remains a hybrid territory, hidden from the sight of Anglo-America and ignored by the Mexican government, people north and south of the Rio Grande will continue to pray to their new Madonna. They have realized that the best way to conquer the mainstream culture of the United States is by media storm, a subversion from within.⁸³

⁸² Jeremy Morris, "Artists as Entrepreneurs, Fans as Workers," *Popular Music and Society* 37, no. 3 (2014): 273-290, accessed April 9, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03007766.2013.778534>.

⁸³ Ilan Stavans, "Santa Selena," *Transition* no. 70 (1996): 43, accessed April 8, 2021, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2935346>.

This “subversion from within” included commercialization of Selena’s image through media and merchandise as means to “conquer the mainstream culture.” This commercialization includes but is not limited to, t-shirts, memorabilia cups, posters, Barbie dolls, a MAC cosmetic line, and magazine collector editions.

Chicano scholar Raul Coronado Jr. also documented the commercialization of Selena’s image following her death in his 2001 article, “Selena’s Good Buy: Texas Mexicans, History, and Selena Meet Transnational Capitalism.” Interviewing Selena fans at the turn of the century, Coronado focuses on the fans’ understanding of Selena as “*una mujer del pueblo* – a woman of the people.”⁸⁴ While analyzing Selena’s performance image Coronado concludes that Selena’s commodification is a fetishization of Texas Mexicans’ dreams and hopes,

The desire to surpass the racism and class exploitation that many of us have experienced, the yearning to change the social and cultural conditions in which our families and friends have lived, and the internal, domestic contestations of gender, sexuality, color, and class among Texas Mexicans – all became displaced dreams and hopes that were ultimately fetishized onto Selena.⁸⁵

Both Stavans and Coronado sensationalize Selena commercialization when trying to examine why Selena’s image has been commodified so heavily after her death. However, Coronado’s analysis on Selena commercialization frames Selena as an icon for her community rather than a means to gain greater awareness of Latinx culture in U.S. mainstream culture.

Selena’s memorialization and fandom created a “generative afterlife of its own,” that was coined Selenidad in 2009 by historian Deborah Paredez. Beyond the commercialization of Selena’s image, Paredez notes other ways Selena was memorialized includes documentaries,

⁸⁴ Raul Coronado Jr., “Selena’s Good Buy: Texas Mexicans, History, and Selena Meet Transnational Capitalism,” *Aztlán: Journal of Chicano Studies* 26, no. 1 (2001): 83.

⁸⁵ Coronado Jr., “Selena’s Good Buy,” 93.

monuments, murals, biographies, Selena look-alike contests, musicals, and drag shows.⁸⁶

Paredes's study analyzes the remembrance of Selena including the upkeep of her memorial in Corpus Christi, the creation of the musical *Selena Forever*, the open casting call for Selena for the biopic *Selena*, and queer Selenidad.

While scholars have focused on Selenidad from 1995-2010, Selena's presence and fandom continues in full force today. Selena's fandom has been incredibly successful in supporting Selena's prominence in popular media beyond her fan subculture. Selena memorabilia continues to be manufactured and marketed to the masses, with official Selena merchandise licensed by Q Productions. Q Productions' online store includes Selena apparel, DVDs, CDs, posters, buttons, and bags. Selena's image is circulated widely in popular culture and the newest Netflix show, *Selena: The Series*, proves that her presence shows no signs of fading.

Contemporary Selenidad has not been studied in scholarly work but has been explored in the 2021 WBUR and Futuro Studios' podcast *Anything for Selena*, created and hosted by Maria Garcia.⁸⁷ The podcast explores Selena's legacy today through different lenses relatable to Selena including "big butt politics," the decline of Tejano after Selena, Spanglish, race, and Selena and the internet. Important to my research was the episode involving Selena and the internet, which is the first study defining and understanding Selena's online presence and archive. Within the podcast episode, Garcia introduced the topic of Selena and the internet as a chance to study Selena's internet "in all its richness, its complexity, its weirdness, and kookiness, because

⁸⁶ Deborah Paredes, *Selenidad: Selena, Latinos, and the Performance of Memory* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 7.

⁸⁷ Maria Garcia, host, *Anything for Selena* (Podcast), *NPR*, accessed April 8, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/podcasts/923101875/anything-for-selena>.

Selena's internet is a place with its own rules, its own norms, its own culture. A textured place worth studying...this world shows us how people protect Selena's legacy."⁸⁸ Selena's digital fandom is place where Selena fans can protect and continue Selena's legacy. Through acts of digital labor, they continue to preserve Selena's legacy in popular culture today.

Digital Fan Labor

Recent popular culture fandom studies explore the role social media sites, like YouTube, generate and contribute to fandom. For example, communications and media scholar Jeremy Morris created the term "digital fan labor" to describe the co-creative labor between a musical artist and their fanbase, particularly through crowdfunding platforms such as Kickstarter. Morris claims that online platforms have increased integration of new media into music making and marketing. He argues that this results in "artists as entrepreneur" and "fans as workers."⁸⁹ In his research he studied the online relationship between fans and the British musician, Imogen Heap.

The idea of digital fan labor has been further utilized in research on online fandom and musical artists. For example, musicologist Kate Galloway uses Jeremy Morris' concept of digital labor to research Taylor Swift's online fandom and her fans' relationship with Taylor Swift's musical greeting cards and YouTube. Galloway highlights the importance of platforms like YouTube for enabling a new sphere for fans to socially connect with other fans.⁹⁰ Galloway described Swifts fans' digital labor as manifesting "in the planning, filming, posting, sharing, commenting on user-generated videos, and developing lasting connections with fans watching

⁸⁸ Maria Garcia, host, "Selena and the Internet," <https://www.npr.org/podcasts/923101875/anything-for-selena>.

⁸⁹ Morris, "Artists as Entrepreneurs, Fans as Workers," 273.

⁹⁰ Kate Galloway, "Musicking Fan Culture and Circulating the Materiality of Taylor Swift Musical Greeting Cards on YouTube," *American Music* 38, no. 2 (Summer 2020): 240-261, accessed February 15, 2021, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/763320>.

them on the other side of the screen.”⁹¹ Selena’s digital fan labor manifests also through the creation of YouTube videos regarding Selena and the posting of old Selena interviews and performances. Her digital fan labor also continues through the posting, sharing, and commenting of social media tribute accounts on Facebook and Instagram, which also requires planning and creativity to maintain.

Selena fans also utilize digital fan labor; however, her fans carry greater entrepreneurial tendencies because Selena is no longer alive. Her fandom creates an opportunity to study the integration of social media and musical marketing when an artist is no longer living. Much like Taylor Swift’s fans, Selena fans digital labor manifests in the “planning, filming, posting, sharing, and commenting” on user-generated videos, but also websites and social media accounts.⁹² Through social media, Selena fans circulate Selena memorabilia and music, as well as move their “imaginary world” into the social world through in person and online fan meet ups.⁹³

Selena Fans and Social Media

Selena’s official online social media presence is run by the Quintanilla family business Q Productions, but her digital fandom includes thousands of tribute accounts. Q Productions also licenses the official merchandising of Selena memorabilia. As of April 2021, the official Selena Quintanilla Facebook page had an astounding 4.6 million followers and the Selena’s official Instagram account had 1.3 million followers. While the Quintanilla family runs the online official social media presence, many fans have created tribute websites and social media

⁹¹ Galloway, “Musicking Fan Culture,” 255.

⁹² Galloway, “Musicking Fan Culture,” 255.

⁹³ John L. Caughey, *Imaginary Social Worlds: A Cultural Approach* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 29.

accounts. The fans participate in digital fan labor as patrons, investors, and collaborators continuing to find more avenues to participate and create Selena fan projects, much in line with Morris's description of modern fandom. Digital fan labor also manifests through the fans petitioning for new Selena merchandise on online websites such as *change.org*.

Selena tribute websites consist of catalogs of past Selena merchandise and history as well as biographical information regarding Selena's life. The website *loveselena.com*, created by 42-year-old Californian Roger Gomez, chronicles all things Selena, including information about the Google Selena Doodle, Selena's Hollywood Walk of Fame, and Selena tribute bands. Also included is a guide to Selena murals throughout the United States and Mexico, as well as Selena-related Corpus Christi locations. *Loveselena.com* also has a Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter presence, with the Facebook page garnering 57,700 likes and the Instagram account 34,000 followers. Similarly, the website *Selenaforever.com*, created by Canadian John Wood, includes biographical and archival information about Selena, including copies of newspaper articles published in 1995. The website also includes video information regarding Selena, including rare video footage, interviews, and videos of fans singing.

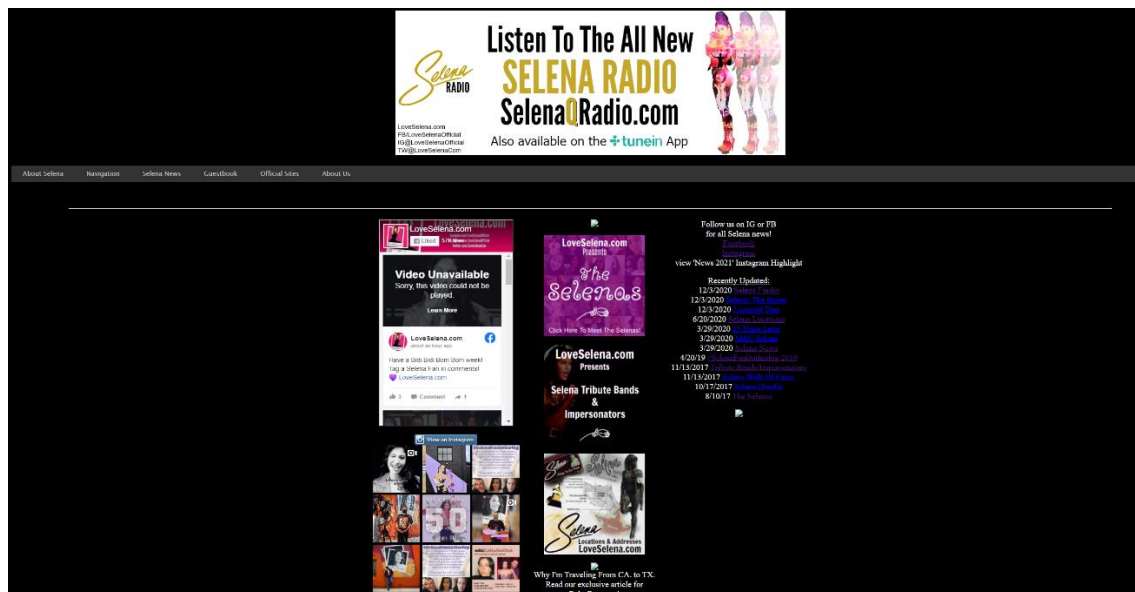


Figure 8. The welcome page to the Selena fandom website, *loveselena.com*.



Figure 9. The welcome page to the Selena fandom website, *selenaforever.com*.

The YouTube account *Anything for Selena Official* is run by 28-year-old Jami Gomez and includes videos regarded Selena-related events such as the Suzette meet and greet at the launch of the Selena White Rose Collection by Forever 21 in Cerritos, California, and the 2019

Selena Fan Gathering in California. Other videos include Selena costume tutorials and information regarding Selena memorabilia like the Selena X Bumpboxx Speaker and the Selena doll from Funko Pop doll. Another aspect of Selena fandom is the creation of Selena tribute Facebook pages. These are especially important for fans in countries where Selena's information and merchandise are limited, such as Brazil. One of these is *Selena Brasil*, which shares content in Portuguese regarding Selena including images of Selena performing with information on the photo and the latest information on the Netflix show *Selena: The Series*.

Fans and Selena's Persona

Fans cite Selena's persona as the inspiration for their digital labor. Seen repeatedly through interviews were fans' affinity towards Selena not only because of her music but because of what she has meant. Many fans of Selena did not know of her until after her passing in 1995. The shocking passing of Selena and the media coverage surrounded it resulted in many non-Tejanos becoming aware of Selena. For example, John recalls first learning about Selena from news coverage on the day of her death. The result of hearing about Selena resulted in John buying Selena's latest CD, he also noted that at the time Selena's song "Dreaming of You" and "I Could Fall in Love" were on the radio. Roger recalled being aware of Selena because of her music video for "Amor Prohibido" and because his parents watched Spanish TV programming, such as The Johnny Canales Show, a show which Selena would perform on. However, it was not until her passing that he began to learn more about Selena and her music because his sister-in-law had asked him to record the news broadcasting on Selena the day of her death. He notes that at 16 years old he became an instant fan of Selena after watching old interviews with her during the news broadcasting.

Other Selena fans were inspired by the 1997 biopic *Selena*. Jami Gomez notes that she became aware of Selena after watching *Selena* when she was a girl, “So probably around the age of eight or nine I saw the movie and of course, that’s what made me really fall in love with her. But, you know, at the same time I had to distinguish the actor from the real person.”⁹⁴ For Jami, the ending scene of *Selena*, including photos of Selena and the vigils following her death, heavily impacted her as she realized that Selena was a real person. John describes a similar experience, noting that after seeing the *Selena* movie was when he became very drawn to learn more about her:

I thought the movie was fine but what really struck me was when they showed the pictures of Selena at the end of it, and I thought, wow, man, she looks so beautiful and full of life in those pictures. And I just really wanted to know more about her so that really piqued my interest.⁹⁵

In Selena fandom, the *Selena* movie has become an important cultural staple in continuing the creation of Selena fans after her passing. Many new fans are introduced to Selena because of their experience with watching the movie, showing how the biographical film has continued Selena fandom today.

The recent addition of *Selena: The Series* offers a new pillar in the Selena fandom culture where a younger generation will be introduced to Selena. As newer generations are introduced to Selena, some older fans have a sense that the newer generation will continue to carry the torch of Selenidad. For example, host of the podcast *Anything for Selena* elaborates in her podcast episode “Selena and the Internet” after discussing a young fourteen-year-old online Selena tribute content creator, “What I love about seeing Sonya share this, a fourteen-year-old, is to me it confirms this idea that Selena is cultural heritage to pass on to. I love to see the young Selena

⁹⁴ Jami Gomez, interview by author, phone call, March 18, 2021.

⁹⁵ John Wood, interview by author, phone call, March 11, 2021.

fandom; I am so ready to pass on the baton.”⁹⁶ Selena fans see their digital fandom labor as how they continue to share the cultural heritage of Selena. This is important for Selena fans as Selena is not alive to continue her memory and share her image.

Fans who created fandom accounts in Selena’s honor all mention that they created the site not just because of their love of Selena’s music but because they supported Selena as a person. Selena’s Latinx working class presentation can be found through the sharing of online interviews of Selena on YouTube accounts. For example, John’s YouTube account contains many interviews of Selena recorded for newscasts that are also shown in documentaries made about Selena’s life. These Selena interviews are a part of a Selena digital archive that allow new Selena fans to get to know Selena beyond the 1997 biopic. Jami recalls why she is drawn to be a fan of Selena today,

I watched real footage of when she was alive and you can just see, the humbleness and the beauty and passion she had for her career and her culture, her family. She was a genuine person. She wasn’t a fake pop star, people who just kind of want the fame. She loved doing music and she loved being her family doing it all. And I think that’s what really made me drawn to her.⁹⁷

Through watching real interviews of Selena, Jami was drawn to Selena’s persona. Later in the interview, Jami explained that her digital fan labor for the Selena fandom is drawn from the ideals Selena stood for and the way she presented herself. She noted that there are many musicians that she enjoys listening to, but these musicians’ arrogant self-presentation would never inspire her to participate in that musician’s fandom.

⁹⁶ Maria Garcia, host, “Selena and the Internet,” Anything for Selena (Podcast), *NPR*, accessed April 8, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/podcasts/923101875/anything-for-selena>.

⁹⁷ Jami Gomez, interview.

Not lost to Jami was the importance of Selena's performance image and personal image. Jami was aware of the barriers Selena broke as a female in the Tejano industry. She found inspiration in Selena's tenacious work ethic. Jami notes,

She was just this young, amazing talent who was so inspired and so goal driven. That's who I look up to as a role model, and I wanted to be like her in a sense, she had no fear of breaking barriers and no fear of being involved at the time with such a male dominated music culture.⁹⁸

Selena's presence as a Latina in the male dominated Tejano scene is not lost on Selena fans.

Many find her hard working and entrepreneurial spirit admiring and it is part of the reason they are a fan of hers.

Selena's work ethic and family values draw Selena fans closer to her and they value her as a role model. Many fans were drawn to her by who she was a person, and this motivated them to learn more. For example, John explains why he believe fans are drawn to Selena,

I think when people learn about Selena, the more they love her because aside from the great music, she was just a fantastic person. She was very careful with her time with the causes in Texas and I think I'm a fan of her as a person and her music, so I just love who she was. I mean if I didn't love it, if she made great music and I didn't love who she was, I wouldn't have made a website in her honor.⁹⁹

For John, his willingness to participate in Selena digital fan labor stemmed from loving who fans believe Selena was as a person. It was his love for Selena as a person that inspired him to create a Selena fandom account and participate in digital fan labor. For Jami, she found Selena represented cultural values that she could relate to and found admiring,

You see how caring she was, how family oriented she was. Her whole family is basically the band as well and just uplifting and upbringing of what became makes you love her even more because as a Hispanic, a lot of us are very closely family oriented. And just like

⁹⁸ Jami Gomez, interview.

⁹⁹ Wood, interview.

obviously you can connect and correlate with her more because of that same bond that you have with your family.¹⁰⁰

Selena's life portrayed Latinx family values that Latinxs today still connect with. These values include a strong work ethic and a closeness with one's family. Fan scholars have explored the idea of fan participation in a fandom because of their shared cultural values. Melissa A Click's study of Lady Gaga's fandom revealed that many fans called themselves Little Monsters and her fandom is a place of "shelter, support, and solidarity."¹⁰¹ Similarly a study of Bruce Springsteen's fans revealed how fans saw Springsteen's music as a time to self-reflect on their own identity and their position in the world.¹⁰² Selena fans also participate in fandom in similar ways, finding connection and solidarity for Selena in the way her life supported Latinx family values.

Other fans were drawn to Selena because of her kind interaction with fans. Selena was known to always make time for meet and greet with fans. Even when she was busy, she promised to come back to her fans waiting for her after or before concerts to sign autographs and take pictures. These memories with fans have been circulated through the online fandom websites such as *Selenaforever.com*. In the section titled, "Selena Fan Memories," fans can submit memories they have with Selena, including meeting her in person. One story shared in 2004 describes a fan meeting Selena at a mall when the author was ten years old: "Selena took the time to chat with us and gave us an autograph. She carried my little brother and pinched my cheeks and told me I was cute. We told her we loved her music and how big of fans we were. SHE WAS AN ANGEL!![sic] The nicest and most beautiful person I had ever met and what a

¹⁰⁰ Jami Gomez, interview.

¹⁰¹ Melissa A. Click, Hyunji Lee, and Holly Willson Holladay, "Making Monsters: Lady Gaga, Fan Identification, and Social Media," *Popular Music and Society* 36, no. 3 (2013): 361.

¹⁰² Daniel Cavicchi, *Tramps Like Us: Music and Meaning among Springsteen Fans* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1998), 188, accessed April 9, 2021, ProQuest Ebook Central.

smile!”¹⁰³ These fans stories are often circulated in Selena fandom and help others gain a closer look into Selena’s persona.

Fascination with Selena’s true persona has made some fans curious to test if Selena was truly kind and generous with her fans. For example, 43-year-old Brazilian fan and contributor to *Selena Brasil*, Merielen Sabaini Yearby explained that when she moved to Texas, she had the opportunity to meet someone who personally knew Selena when she was alive. She explains, “So I asked him a lot of questions like was she really humble like that? Because she would talk to people and she would be nice to people like we see in videos. He said, ‘Yes, that’s her one-hundred percent.’”¹⁰⁴ The authenticity of Selena with her fans has made an impact to Selena fans after her passing. Selena’s positive fan interactions drew Roger to Selena,

Instantly it was the way she was, the way she interacted with fans, the way she was outgoing, funny, instantly it was that. And on top of that there wasn’t anybody like her, as open to her fans as she was especially in the Latino community, she was very close to people and her fans and that was what attracted me to her.¹⁰⁵

The continual questioning and affirming of Selena’s positive relationship with fans and her kindness continue to push fans to share her legacy. This love for Selena’s persona creates a passionate fanbase that longs for connection with this digital community that often resulting in meeting online and the in person.

Selena Fans and Her Music

Seen repeatedly through interviews were fans’ immediate action of buying Selena memorabilia once finding out about her. From the fans I interviewed, their first purchase was

¹⁰³ Manuel Mendez III, “Selena Fan Memories – Manuel’s Story,” posted September 5, 2004, accessed April 7, 2021, <http://www.selenaforever.com/SelenaMemories/SelenaMemories1.html>.

¹⁰⁴ Merielen Sabaini Yearby, interview by author, zoom call, April 6, 2021.

¹⁰⁵ Roger Gomez, interview by author, phone call, March 12, 2021.

Selena's crossover CD, *Dreaming of You*, as they did not know of Selena until after death. For example, John recalls first learning about Selena, "I heard that she was murdered, and it was kind of shocking, but I didn't know anything about her music and had never heard her music, but I was curious, and I felt bad that she passed on so I bought *Dreaming of You*." Hearing about Selena resulted in John buying Selena's latest CD but it was not until watching the biopic that he became more intrigued to learn about her.

Merielen first became acquainted with Selena through music on her *Dreaming of You* album, which was played on the radio in Brazil, however Merielen was not aware that the singer was Selena but liked Selena's singing voice. She explains, "Two years later, I watched the Selena movie on TV and the scene that J. Lo was singing and recording 'I Could Fall in Love' and I was like, oh my goodness, that's her Selena, I'm going to buy her CD tomorrow, you know?" The ending of the Selena movie greatly impacted Merielen, and she immediately wanted to learn more about Selena and buy merchandise, "I was crying like a baby, you know, I was like, why? Why is it happening? And from that day on, I started researching things about her and I was really obsessed."¹⁰⁶ Her obsession with Selena even led her to learn English, as there was no online biographical Selena information in Portuguese.

Many fans first interaction in Selena memorabilia culture was through buying Selena CDs. However, fans interviewed noted that their current favorite Selena songs were not from Selena's English album *Dreaming of You*, but from her earlier predominantly Spanish albums. For example, favorite songs included, "No Me Queda Más," "Baila esta Cumbia," and "Fotos y Recuerdos." The Spanish songs notated encompass mariachi and cumbia Latinx styles,

¹⁰⁶ Sabaini Yearby, interview.

furthering showing that fans' affinity with Selena is more in line with her Mexican American heritage than her Americanized pop crossover sound. Ultimately, it was Selena's Latinx working-class values and presentation that fans were drawn to and are still drawn to today.

“Anything for Selena” – Digital Fan Labor

Selena fans that participate in Selena's digital fan labor do so by continuing to promote and buy Selena merchandise. Buying, sharing, and helping others obtain Selena merchandise composes a large part of Selena's fandom culture. Selena fans' desire to own Selena merchandise stems from a desire to want to be tangibly close to Selena. Many fans were unable to meet Selena in person as they did not know about her until after her death. Merielen explains her desire for having Selena merchandise, “I actually want to touch stuff that was related to her, but deep inside I think it's just a way to have more of her close to me.”¹⁰⁷ For Roger, collecting Selena items also allows him to feel close to Selena since he never got to meet her in person, “I think it's because personally I never got to see her live. I never got to see her and experience her before her death, it's like having a piece of her.”¹⁰⁸ Since fans are unable to meet Selena, fans rely more heavily on the digital fandom and collecting memorabilia to express their fan loyalty. Added to this inability to meet Selena are fans desire to go to Corpus Christi to visit the sites Selena was in personally, however many are unable to afford to go and buy Selena memorabilia. This recalls studies on K-Pop's popularity in Latin America, where many fans have a strong digital presence since they are unable to attend concerts in Korea for financial reasons.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Sabaini Yearby, interview.

¹⁰⁸ Roger Gomez, interview.

¹⁰⁹ Benjamin Han, “K-Pop in Latin America: Transcultural fandom and digital mediation,” *International Journal of Communication Online* (2017), accessed April 3, 2021, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A498245180/LitRC?u=faye28748&sid=LitRC&xid=3a6f9fd9>.

In 2014, Roger started the Selena Fan Gathering in California to allow for Selena fans in California to celebrate Selena's life as many of them are unable to attend Selena fan events in Texas due to distance. The Selena Fan Gathering offers an opportunity for Selena's digital fandom to move from "imaginary world" to the social world, as the event is promoted through the *Loveselena* tribute accounts to Selena fans. Roger describes the event as a time Selena fans can come "celebrate love and celebrate Selena." He describes Selena's fandom as love, elaborating on this description he claims, "We absolutely love Selena to the moon and back, there is so much love for Selena and I see this on a daily basis through my social media accounts."¹¹⁰ This event occurs yearly at the Selena mural in the Plaza de la Raza in Lincoln Park; features Selena tribute bands and impersonators, giveaways, contests, and ultimately is an opportunity for fans to meet one another and share their love for Selena. Roger noted that the event now attracts 3,000 people many traveling from other countries to participate in the fan gathering.

Selena fans have also contributed to Selena's commercialization by selling and promoting fan made memorabilia. The YouTube channel, *Anything for Selena*, came from Jami's desire to merge her skills as a journalist with her love for Selena. Jami's channel seeks to connect Selena fans to other people who contribute to Selena's legacy. Her early videos include personal interview with fans as well as information regarding events involving Selena's legacy similar to a news package. For example, a 2019 video highlights a vendor at the Selena Fan Gathering in California. Jami interviews a young Selena fan and entrepreneur Briana Padilla, owner of Bri Bella's Cute N Bows. At the event Briana sold bows of many patterns but her Selena patterned

¹¹⁰ Roger Gomez, interview.

bows sold out quickly at the start of the event.¹¹¹ The YouTube channel serves as a digital space to continue Selena's legacy while also highlighting how the next generation of Selena fans are keeping her memory alive and continuing Selena's commercialization.

Selena fans also continue Selena's memory through digital fan labor involving advertising Selena's merchandise and petitioning for new merchandise to be made. Selena's passing and the constant rejuvenation of new fans due to the movie *Selena*, has resulted in many fans petitioning for new Selena merchandise on websites such as *change.org*. For example, fans petitioned for MAC Cosmetics to release a Selena inspired makeup line, which resulted in the family collaborating with MAC and releasing a makeup line in 2016. The success of MAC Selena resulted in a sequel makeup line launch in 2020. Fans have also petitioned for the creation of a Selena Made Tussauds wax figure which garnered 9,742 supporters and was created in 2016.¹¹² Roger utilized his social media platform to increase awareness of the petition by adding the petition link on his tribute website for other Selena fans to support. Through their social media accounts and websites, fans continue Selena's memory by continuing to share their experiences with her merchandise and petitioning for more.

A commonality for Selena fans was the close-knit nature of the group. Many maintain group chats and WhatsApp group chats to talk about Selena news, including new Selena merchandise that is being released. For Merielen, her desire for Selena items was difficult to appease because there are no Brazilian markets for Selena merchandise. Merielen relied on

¹¹¹ "Selena Fan Gathering 2019 Bri Bellas Cute N Bows," Anything for Selena Official, YouTube video, posted June 13, 2019, accessed April 9, 2021, <https://youtu.be/GBY-OYud-UQ>.

¹¹² "Madame Tussauds Hollywood," change.org, accessed April 8, 2021, https://www.change.org/p/create-a-selena-wax-figure-at-madame-tussauds-hollywood-madame-tussauds-hollywood?recruiter=24059580&utm_source=share_petition&utm_medium=copylink&utm_content=pm_checklist_email%3Achecklist.

friends visiting the United States to bring her merchandise. Since 2018 she has lived in the United States and collects Selena items to bring to Brazil when she visits. She also continues Selena fandom in Brazil by doing online giveaways on the Facebook page *Selena Brasil* for Brazilian Selena fans who are unable to obtain Selena items. Similarly, Jami from California has made friends through her YouTube channel that live in Texas and have helped her collect Selena memorabilia cups only sold in Texas. Jami has also helped other Selena fans gain Selena collectables, such as letting fans buy her extra Selena Funko Pop items as she was able to drive to a Funko Pop store and buy the limited editions items before they sold out.

Conclusion

Ultimately digital fan labor has allowed for Selena's memory to continue to be circulated to a general public. The large enclaves of Selena tribute accounts add to a growing digital Selena archive for new fans to learn about Selena. Selena fan gatherings such as the Selena Fan Gathering and the Q Productions' Fiesta de la Flor allows for fans' online community to manifest in real life. Many fans maintain relationships with other fans through bonding over new merchandise and Selena related events.

Selena fandom spans internationally and beyond the Latinx community. Many fans who run Selena fandom accounts are passionate about continuing Selena's legacy because of her Latina working-class persona and values. Rogers explains, "She represents to everyone that dreams can come true, that if you work hard enough like she did you dreams and what you want can happen. That's simply a daily reminder on why I love Selena, and not just because I'm Latino and she was Latina."¹¹³ Selena's inspirational quotes and her life transcends beyond the

¹¹³ Roger Gomez, interview.

Latinx community. John also agreed that it is important for Selena to be remembered because she continues to be a role model for young girls today, “A lot of times, the people who hold people hold up as heroes fall show in some ways down the road, but Selena never did, and I don’t think she ever would fall short has she lived.”¹¹⁴ Even though Selena only lived until she was 23, fans continue to remember and uncover more about her, especially through fans sharing memories of meeting her or through the sharing of stories by family members, such as Chris Perez’s 2012 book about his relationship and marriage with Selena, *To Selena with Love*. Merielen hopes that by continuing to remember Selena today, the kindness that she brought would inspires others, “Her kindness should be something that inspires people, but you don’t see a lot of kindness on her fan comments, but I still hope that people will be inspired by her kindness and try to be nice to people.”¹¹⁵ Selena’s fans hope that by continuing her memory the values Selena stood for will make a positive impact to the lives of her fans and beyond. Selena’s stylistic mixtures of Latinx and American musical identities offers an opportunity for new fans, Latinx and non-Latinx, to learn about Latinx culture and musical heritage. Selena’s legacy also highlights the importance of American musical culture and sound on Mexican American artists and identity, further proving that not all Latinx Americans are the same.

As fans continue to circulate and add to the digital archive of Selena, her legacy continues today. Selena’s fandom continues to grow as more people learn about Selena through new content such as *Selena: The Series*. These new fans can find an online archive of Selena created by the fandom. Many will find as they dive deeper into Selena’s internet, they are able to meet Selena’s persona, a young, kind, and hardworking Latina who loved her family and fans.

¹¹⁴ Wood, interview.

¹¹⁵ Sabiani Yearby, interview.

Even today, no Mexican American Latina has been able to capture the hearts of the larger non-Latinx U.S. mainstream as well as the Southwestern fans of the *frontera*. Selena was already thinking about her legacy before her death claiming, “I want to be remembered not only as an entertainer but as a person who cared a lot, and I gave the best that I could. I tried to be the best role model that I possibly could.”¹¹⁶ Her fans continue to work towards Selena’s wish, to be remembered not just for her performance image but for who she was as a person.

¹¹⁶ “Selena Quintanilla Interview Lubbock, Texas 1994 (RARE),” Selfanaticos Online, YouTube video, posted January 3, 2018, accessed April 9, 2021, <https://youtu.be/YFzBgMDr0kg>.

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